

ABSTRACT

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This study provided in-depth personal insight into the phenomenon of the mentorship experiences of community college presidents to provide a view into how their interaction has impacted them to help provide guidance to other potential mentors. Study participants represented community colleges in North Carolina. Community colleges, colleges, and universities across the world are experiencing a new phenomenon where three generations are working in the same environment and attending graduate degree programs simultaneously. While Baby Boomers traditionally represented most of the workforce, now this generation represents 25% of the total workforce (Fry, 2018). However, in the college president arena, Boomers still hold nearly 60% of the college president leadership positions. Community college presidents serving as executive mentors could transfer their tacit knowledge given their extensive tenure and experience to prepare a multigenerational pool of community college leaders.

Community college presidents are serving at older ages. Given the increased awareness of aging community college presidents, community colleges have been more proactive in trying to address their pipeline needs. Based on the survey of community college presidents released by *Inside Higher Ed*, “17 percent compared to 26 percent of college presidents a year ago indicated they planned to retire in the next two years” (Jaschik & Lederman, 2019, p. 20). Audrey Jaeger, executive director of the Belk Center for Community College Leadership at North Carolina State University stated: “The issue is [now] less about how many are retiring but how can we prepare current and future presidents for these complex jobs” (Smith, 2019, The Presidential Pipeline section).

This study highlighted the impact and the experiences of community college president mentors based on their leadership interaction through an executive-level mentorship program designed for graduate students pursuing community college leadership roles. Through a qualitative lens, data were collected from seven executive mentors who serve as expert practitioners to graduate students in pursuit of a terminal degree with hopes of establishing similar leadership roles as their mentors. This study provided a view into the mentors' experiences and outcomes based on leader-member exchanges in an educational environment and how the social exchange between mentor and mentees resulted in bilateral knowledge transfer between mentors and mentees. Human capital theory and leader-member exchange addressed how mentorship could allow for knowledge transfer to those in the mentorship relationship. The community college presidents are investing their time and knowledge, while the students/mentees are investing in themselves to learn and acquire the skills required to be future leaders. Mentors increased their human capital by learning from mentees, hence furthering their knowledge and personal growth through mentoring. This study applied an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach to research the gap around the mentor experiences to understand what experiences they have had during the mentorship program and identify their perceived benefits and any negative impacts.

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Serving as a Mentor: Experiences of Community College Presidents via a Leader Member
Exchange Framework

by
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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to mentors in the United States who want to continue providing valuable contributions within their field and desire the personal interactions with faculty and students to be able to learn and gain value from those that they may mentor. As our community college presidents gain further tenure, they often have limited opportunities to transfer their tacit knowledge and feel disconnected when they can only deliver general recommendations and tenants to student bodies and faculty members. This research is for college presidents who want to understand the experiences of other mentors participating in a mentorship program.

BIOGRAPHY

Jerry Warren Bryant graduated from John Marshall High School in Rochester, New York and earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of Buffalo. Jerry began his career as a research and design engineer intern converting to full time at Xerox in 1996. He soon leveraged his intern and engineering knowledge and began attending the University of Rochester to achieve his Master of Science in Image and Signal Processing. He then continued his career in technology at Corning Incorporated, GregtagMacbeth, and Tekelec (an Oracle Company). He achieved his MBA from North Carolina State University (NC State) to merge his technical background with his business experience. He then moved to The Federal Reserve where he currently works as an Assistant Vice President and realized his lifelong desire for continuous learning and self-improvement. In 2016, he began his journey as a student at NC State in the Doctor of Philosophy in the Adult, Workforce, and Continuing Education program concentrating in Human Resource Development/Human Resource Management.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement.....	2
Background of the Study	2
Purpose Statement	5
Research Question	6
Significance of the Study.....	7
Key Terminology.....	8
Organization of the Study.....	11
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	13
Formal Mentoring Definition	14
Mentoring Relationship Outcomes.....	14
Leader-Member Interaction.....	15
Engagement Strategies	16
Human Capital Theory	17
Reverse Mentoring	18
Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory	19
Transformational Leadership Theory	20
Chapter Summary	21
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	24
Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as a Method of Qualitative Inquiry	25

Program Selection	27
Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent	29
Sample and Participants	29
Interview Data Collection.....	30
Interview Data Analysis	31
Data Integration and Interpretation (Summarizing the Data).....	33
Positionality Statement.....	34
Limitations.....	35
Delimitations	35
Chapter Summary	36
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	37
Participants	38
Results	39
Individual Textual Descriptions	39
Frankie “WC-135 Phoenix”	40
Charlie “B-2 Spirit”	41
Sidney A-10 “Warthog”	43
Reilly B-52 “Stratofortress”	45
Robin “C-130 Hercules”.....	46
Finley “C-17 Globemaster”	48
Toni “Air Force One”	49
Research Question	52
Themes	52

Positive Organizational Impact	53
Leadership Style	56
Transforming Student Lives	60
Obligation to Train Future Leaders	63
Spiritual Fulfillment	67
Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment.....	68
Giving Back to the Community.....	70
Chapter Summary	73
Convergence and Divergence.....	77
Composite Descriptions (Essence of the Experience).....	78
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	80
Review of Purpose and Research Question.....	80
Summary of Findings	81
Connecting Themes to Previous Literature	82
Connecting Findings to Leader-Member Exchange Theory	85
Implications for Practice.....	88
Executive-Level Mentorship Program Implementation	88
Matching Community College President with Aspiring Leaders.....	88
Encourage Participation.....	89
Implications for Policy	90
Leader Success	90
Policies for Community College Collaboration	91
Financial and Time Investment	92

Future Research Opportunities	92
Conclusion	93
CHAPTER 6: SERVING AS A MENTOR: EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS.....	96
Introduction	96
Key Points	97
The Project.....	97
For Decision Makers: Impact on Policy and Practice	102
Conclusion	103
REFERENCES	104
APPENDICES.....	117
Appendix A: Research Method Diagram	118
Appendix B: Interview Release Form	119
Appendix C: Interview Protocol.....	121
Appendix D: Email Letter to Participants	123
Appendix E: IRB Protocol Approval	124

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Participant Identifiers	39
Table 2	Derived Themes	53

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	What Distinguishes Transformational Leadership.....	21
Figure 2	Scheme for Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.....	27
Figure 3	Community College Regions Represented in the Study.....	38
Figure 4	Dyadic Relationship.....	86
Figure 5	High Quality Relationship Impact.....	87

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Human resource development (HRD) according to Holton and Swanson (2001) “is a process for developing and unleashing human expertise through organization development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance” (p. 4). This improved performance can be at the individual and organizational level. There also needs to be a consideration of how employees engage in the workplace and their effects on an organization’s productivity, profitability, and ultimate survival. Understanding which leadership activities yield positive results can enhance an individual’s and their organization’s performance. Deptula and Williams (2017) suggested it is important to capitalize on dyadic relationships in human resource development initiatives to develop talent through proactive interactions. Deptula and Williams (2017) argued the dyadic interactions increase learning for mentor and mentee, thereby succeeding in human resource development. Additionally, within the field of human resource management/development, there is also the drive to understand practices that may further enhance the productivity and engagement of an employee (Delery, 1998). According to Delery (1998), “The resource base viewed proposes that an organization can gain a competitive view from the resources it possesses” (p. 289). Rock and Garavan (2006) suggested that organizational support has a direct impact on mentoring success. Anderson (2009) positioned that aligning Human Resource Development objectives with organizational development will increase the impact and success given it is more likely to gain support of leadership.

While most studies examine a mentoring focus on the mentee perspective, this study explored how serving as a mentor impacts the performance of the mentor and their perception of how it impacts the organization. This study also explored the experiences of community college presidents based on participation in an executive-level mentorship program.

Problem Statement

Throughout the country, community college presidents are at or approaching retirement age or are ready to retire now (Alamuddin, 2017). There are concerns that there are not enough qualified candidates to take on the challenging presidency role due to limited traditional pipelines and leadership programs. Additionally, in an American Council on Education (2017) poll, 27% of presidents indicated difficulty cultivating leadership in others. The research suggested that having a “weak ties” mentor was associated with higher educational attainment, higher income, and more time spent volunteering (Hagler & Rhodes, 2018, p. 175). Alamuddin (2017) also stressed that a core challenge for community college leaders is to improve the success of their students in a rapidly changing environment. The skills needed for the presidency requires a more profound and broader skill set that future candidates need, which would benefit from leader mentorship and engagement. In the next section, there is additional rich text about the problem, additional background of the study, and emphasis on mentorship and the impact of mentorship on the mentor.

Background of the Study

The Baby Boomer population is defined as those 74.9 million people born between 1946 and 1964 with the first wave of 62-year-old Baby Boomers retiring in 2008 (AARP, 2014). It is estimated that roughly 10,000 to 11,000 people retire every day (Fry, 2018) or are eligible to retire and that 4 million people will be leaving the workforce every year starting from 2008. Even with the mass exodus of Baby Boomers, they still represent 25% of the workforce (Fry, 2018). When many individuals leave the workplace, it creates a leadership vacuum that is not easily replaced or passed along to the remaining generations (Callanun & Greenhaus, 2008; Deal et al., 2010). Thorough research had documented the number of retirees leaving the workplace

nationally and internationally. However, more research is needed to determine what motivating factors might enable or encourage Boomers to remain “engaged” in the workplace (Callanun & Greenhaus, 2008; Dohm, 2000) to mentor those looking to take on future leadership positions.

Within the college and universities across the United States, the average age of a college president is 61 (Seltzer, 2017) with community college presidents having an average tenure of six years (Gluckman, 2017). One research-intensive university with a land-grant mission implemented an executive-level mentorship program allowing space for community college presidents to devote their own time, resources, and wisdom in service to graduate students pursuing a doctorate degree. Fry (2018) estimated that Millennials have overtaken Baby Boomers as America’s largest living generation. Millennials represent 75.4 million people born between 1981 and 1997. The population changes have given rise to challenging management conditions for leadership teams across the United States.

Leadership teams are having to contend with a scenario where there are four generations vying for employment and attention in the workforce. Given the changing dynamics of the U.S. workforce population, leadership teams need engagement strategies for organizations that are quickly transitioning from a Baby Boomer dominant workforce to a primarily mixed, multi-generational workforce. Within the community college space, presidents have learned to manage across the generational divide and share and transfer tacit knowledge to the students within the executive-level mentorship program. Osborne (2020) highlighted that since 2015, 39 of the 58 community colleges in North Carolina had experienced some level of turnover and at the time of publication there were four active presidential searches. Osborne (2020) indicated the four searchers were active even during the current pandemic. Hence, there is a need to train the next

generation of leaders to take on these roles given there continues to be turnover in the presidential leadership space.

This dissertation evaluated one of the top five challenges identified by college presidents in an American Council on Education (2017) poll where 27% of presidents indicated difficulty cultivating leadership in others. More specifically, this dissertation sought to understand the experiences of community college presidents who participated within an executive-level mentorship program. According to Chun et al. (2012), “literature on formal mentoring has at least two critical research gaps: less attention has been paid to mentors’ and mutual benefits for both mentors and protégés than protégé outcomes” (p. 1072). This study applied an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach to research the gap around the mentor experiences to understand what experiences they have had during the mentorship program and identify their perceived benefits and any negative impacts.

Qualitative research methods examined the experiences focusing on the positive leadership outcomes that could be modeled to improve leader engagement/knowledge transfer participation and positive impact to mentees. Research focused on mentorship and the benefits to the mentor may improve the overall engagement of mentors and mentees (Chun et al., 2012). The outcome of this research effort may increase new graduate effectiveness and enhance their productivity as they take on new leadership positions in the community college or higher education workspace.

Leader member exchange (LMX) could leverage the expertise of multiple generations respectively by being perceptive of their different needs, value systems, and work demands (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012) and provide a learning benefit for the mentor. Identifying the

benefits and experiences of mentors in the executive-level mentorship program can help foster participation from other senior leaders.

Engagement of senior leaders will allow for their own personal benefit along with a long-lasting contribution to the higher education leadership talent pool which is the essence of human capital theory (HCT). Human capital theory framed why mentors engaged and improved the human capital of the mentees to increase their future contribution to education, specifically community colleges. Sweetland (1996) explained that education in the form of on-the-job training and apprenticeship/mentorship can increase human capital for those that invest their personal time to participate.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative study addressed whether participation in an executive-level mentorship program has an impact on the mentor. Leader member exchange theory along with human capital theory are lenses that provided an overarching framework for the study. Leader member exchange addresses the issues mentors face in implementing effective engagement strategies for the individuals they are mentoring. Community college presidents engage with student cohorts to transfer knowledge downward, or in the case of reverse mentoring, the opportunity to learn new skills from the students in which they are mentoring. Leader member exchange can be transformational by fostering behavioral change to attain a personal goal. Mezirow (1995) stated, although reluctantly, that learning may result from the accumulation of experiences over time, which is what the executive-level mentorship program aims to achieve for not only the students, but more importantly for this study, the executive mentors. These theories provided the framework of how knowledge is transferred from individual to individual. However, HCT provides the framework of why mentor and mentee participation is the focus of the dissertation

in that they want to improve themselves and their livelihood. Mincer (1958) initial work and T.W Schultz's (1971) investment in human capital further contributed to HCT. Human capital theory postulates that human capital is the skill, knowledge, and experience that translates to economic value or ability to perform a labor task from an individual perspective. The human capital provides the mentor and mentee the ability to further themselves storing and leveraging their educational "value." The potential benefit is the premise of why each would participate in the symbiotic experience.

These theories provided the opportunity to look at how leadership and mentorship may impact the experiences, engagement, and ultimately performance of the mentor. The study included qualitative data gathered through interviews. The researcher probed deeper when asking the initial questions within the interview. The qualitative component utilized a semistructured interview format to capture experiences from the executive community college presidents. Additionally, by understanding the experiences, it was possible to determine whether learning happened for the mentor and subsequently their mentees.

Research Question

Organizational culture, organizational policies, and engagement are key contributors to the experiences of individuals. These factors then have a significant impact on the generational engagement within the workplace. In the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach, the researcher interviewed seven community college presidents within the mentorship program. To illuminate the experiences of the college presidents, the following research question was addressed: What are the experiences of community college presidents based on participation in an executive-level mentorship program?

Significance of the Study

Community college presidents possess valuable organizational information and knowledge that would be lost if they left the workplace without transferring that knowledge to the next generation of leaders. Callanun and Greenhaus (2008) and Deal et al. (2010) suggested that there is the risk of tacit knowledge being lost if there is a leadership gap, hence this research examined the experiences of college presidents and those in which they mentor to understand the benefits and whether the symbiotic experience resulted in increased engagement. Schwan et al. (2020) explained in their research that a mentorship program is an effective way to enable collaboration and promotion of self-improvement. College presidents rely upon the knowledge they have obtained via their vast career experiences to mentor the graduate students. There is also an opportunity to employ reverse mentoring for the college presidents to broaden the college president's skill set. Schwan et al. (2020) highlighted that people can become isolated in their roles and that having an avenue like a mentorship program can improve personal job performance based on participation in a collaborative program. Human capital theory established by Mincer (1958) and Schultz (1971) provided the framework of the benefits of mentoring and why mentors and mentees would engage in the mentorship experience. Leader member exchange and addressed engagement methods for effective information sharing. These theories provided understanding of ways to improve the overall knowledge transfer and understanding of the experiences of the mentor group. Garte and Kronen (2020) suggested mentorship can provide the medium for shared meanings amongst mentorship participants and equal power exchange among those members supporting. Mentorship can be an enabler for leader-member exchange and improving human capital. Schwan et al. (2020) stated mentees, who participate in high-quality programs that include a comprehensive mentoring component, showed increased resource

retention, improved student achievement, and reduced human resources and financial costs associated with turnover. This study provided insight on gaps in existing literature regarding the experience of being an executive mentor.

Key Terminology

The following list of terms and phrases below are utilized throughout this study:

Baby Boomers: The workplace population born from 1946-1964, roughly 57-75 years of age represent just over 25% of those employees in the workplace (Fry, 2018).

Employee Engagement: The interaction among workers with the exchange of institutional and technical knowledge for personal benefit and the benefit of an organization.

Generation X: The workplace population born from 1965-1980, roughly 41-56 years of age, and represents just over 33% of those employees in the workplace (Fry, 2018).

Human Capital Theory (HCT): Human capital theory was developed by American economists Jacob Mincer, T. W. Schultz, and Gary Becker who “argued that the whole set of human knowledge, skills, abilities, and motivations is the individual capital” (Galiakberova, 2019, p. 411). “Human capital theory suggests that individuals and society derive economic benefits from investments in people” (Sweetland, 1996, p. 341)

Human Resource Development (HRD): Human resource development is the use of integrated and career development to help employees develop their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Human resource development can also be used to improve groups and organizational effectiveness (Holton & Swanson, 2001). In this study, the key focus is the mentor, but the participation in providing mentorship improves the skills of the students involved. It also improves the organization, which would be the community college leadership candidate pool.

Human resource development enables the individual to succeed in their current job and positions them for future opportunities.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA): Alase (2017) explains that IPA gives researchers the best opportunity to understand the research participants 'lived experiences' (p. 9). Interpretative phenomenological analysis approach allows the interviewees (e.g., research participants) to express themselves and their 'lived experience' stories the way they see fit without any distortion and/or prosecution (Alase, 2017, p. 9). Using IPA allows the researcher to explore the 'lived experiences' of the research participants.

Knowledge Transfer: The measurement or equivalency of a key component of employee engagement (Carmeli et al., 2010).

Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX): Leader-member exchange theory focuses on the dyadic relationship between the community college presidents (leader) and the mentee graduate students (member). The theory suggests that a relationship-based interaction between leader and member will yield positive results for both parties involved (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1996).

Mentee: The less experienced person in the mentorship relationship. In this study, the mentee is the graduate student participating in the executive-level mentorship program in which the community college presidents are the mentors. The mentee is the person who feels the need to change, learn, and develop (Poulsen, 2013, p. 256).

Mentors: Represents community college presidents within North Carolina. The importance of the research is relevant to individual experiences. "Over the course of your career, have you had a mentor? A mentor is an experienced employee who serves as a role model, provides support, direction and feedback regarding career plans and interpersonal development.

A mentor is also someone who is in a position of power, who looks out for you, gives you advice and/or brings your accomplishments to the attention of people who have power in the company.

To assist individuals in their development and advancement, some organizations have established formal mentoring programs, where protégés and mentors are linked in some way.

This may be accomplished by assigning mentors or by just providing formal opportunities aimed at developing the relationship. To recap, formal mentoring programs are developed with organizational assistance. Informal mentoring relationships are developed spontaneously, without organizational assistance.”

Mentoring: Schulleri and Saleh (2020, p. 1297) stated, “Mentoring is a professional development strategy that is now used in many establishments for the improvement of skills and performance.” According to Searby et al. (2015) defined mentoring is defined as “a process that enhances an individual’s professional development” giving rise to “higher salaries, better promotions, and greater job satisfaction” (p. 99). Day & Allen (2004) stated: “Mentoring is a continuous and dynamic feedback between two individuals to establish a relationship through which an individual shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else” (p. 77).

Mentorship: Represents a relationship between a more experienced party transferring what they have learned to the less experienced person. In the relationship, the more experienced person is the mentor and the person being mentored is the mentee.

Millennials: The workplace population born from 1981-1996, roughly 25-40 years of age, and represents just over 35% of those employees in the workplace (Fry, 2018).

Phenomenology: Smith (2013) stated:

Phenomenology is the study of ‘phenomena’: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first-person point of view. (p. 1)

Reverse Mentoring: This is characterized as the students’ mentoring the community college presidents or providing value to the mentor that would not have been obtained without participation in the mentorship program (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012). Reverse mentoring is fostering a reciprocal bi-directional relationship (Carmeli et al., 2010; Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012).

Social Exchange Theory: Social exchange is the focus on social-emotional resources (Blau, 1964). In this study, it will be the social resources within a multigenerational organization. Blau (1964) explained that an organization can greatly influence and define the nature of the exchange relationship (i.e., engagement). Bulkan (2013) also supported that philosophy in that the influence can be indirectly through organizational culture or leadership behaviors. In this study community college presidents are the leaders and Ed.D. students are the protégés.

Transformational Leadership: A leadership approach in which the aim is to foster a positive change in those being led (Bass & Bass 2008).

Organization of the Study

Chapter one highlighted the significance of cultivating leadership in others and the need to train future leaders. There is an opportunity to have senior leaders provide mentorship through leader-member exchange while potentially receiving benefits from the leader-member experience.

Chapter two will provide a literature review, highlight engagement strategies, and provide the theoretical framework utilized in the study. In chapter three, the qualitative methods are described to obtain information from the participants, analyze the data collected, and provide an initial summary of the data. Based on the methodology described in chapter three, chapter four will examine the research findings. Chapter five will discuss recommendations for practice and policy.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of community college presidents based on their participation in the executive-level mentorship program. The initial portion of the literature review provides the context of mentorship. It is important to provide an understanding and context of the mentorship because it underpins why individuals have dedicated their time and efforts to participate in an executive-level mentorship program.

In the literature review, there is an explanation of why mentorship is important. Existing research has traditionally focused on the benefits of the mentor. However, to encourage larger mentor participation, benefits of the mentor need to be understood. Human capital theory will be one of the foundations of why mentors should participate in leading mentorship opportunities. Leader member exchange will also provide the key lens of understanding why mentors participate in a mentor relationship and will explain the dyadic relationship that resulted in the executive-level mentorship in this study.

Lastly, within the literature review, this section is about how mentors can share their knowledge based on their participation within the executive-level mentorship program. There is also a focus on how the mentor could benefit from their interaction within a mentorship arrangement. Research in this area reviewed theories, including leader membership exchange, human capital theory, and transformational leadership, that facilitate knowledge transfer and relationship building to provide a foundation to understand and shape mentorship practice. In addition to theory, the literature review also explored leadership styles and engagement strategies to further emphasize how mentorship is facilitated that could further enhance the mentor's ability to grow their skills.

Formal Mentoring Definition

Allen (2007) defined mentor as “an individual with advanced knowledge, usually more senior in some regard, who is committed to providing upward career mobility and assistance for the protégé” (p. 150). Allen (2007) suggested that there are two functions in mentoring relationships. Allen (2007) summarized that the first function is that the mentor provides professional career development and promotes professional growth by providing information and challenging assignments. The second function is that the mentor provides professional growth through emotional support and guidance (Allen, 2007). To develop a pipeline of future leaders, a graduate education program centered around education administration recognized the mentoring advantages and launched an executive-level mentorship program. Graduate students within the sponsored program are awarded the opportunity to acquire experience by partnering with community college presidents. In this mentoring scenario, the community college presidents represent the mentors, thereby filling the role as the experienced leader providing mentorship to the protégé graduate students. The mentorship program gives the graduate student focusing on leadership roles the opportunity to acquire competencies to lead transformational change via coursework and through real-world experience through their mentor-practitioner perspective. The mentorship program is implemented with an outcome in mind and the success is dependent on the mentor-mentee relationship. In the next section, mentoring relationship outcomes is explained in further detail.

Mentoring Relationship Outcomes

A workforce requires engagement and knowledge transfer strategy changes (Bardia, 2010; Mirvis, 2012). In this case, the executive-level leadership program is hypothesized to have positive outcomes for the mentor. Another potential outcome for mentors and mentees could be

psychological health and personal well-being (Kram & Ragins, 2007). Chun et al. (2012) stated, “Research in the social, health, and positive psychology domains suggests that helping others increases one’s own positive emotion” (p. 1072). Kram and Ragins (2007) indicated there is potential positive impact for mentor and mentee from having social support and providing well-being benefits for those participants.

Ragins and Kram (2007) emphasized that formal mentoring programs require a well thought out structure and that the outcomes are highly dependent on high-quality relationships. The chapter explains that the matching process should be well thought out on what one wants to emphasize in the relationship to best affect the outcomes for mentor and mentees. Chun et al. (2012) suggested that both mentors and protégés benefit from high-quality relationships. For there to be high-quality relationships, it is essential to understand the leader-member interaction. There are leadership challenges in relating to those whom they mentor. Within the leader-member literature, the researcher highlighted considerations that need to be understood to achieve a high-quality relationship.

Leader-Member Interaction

It is essential to understand the experiences of the worker with an organization. For example, there was an underlying assumption that workers experienced negative and positive stereotypes (AARP, 2014). In explaining the perceived stereotypes and discrimination, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, years of experience; in-group favoritism leads to the perspective that one is preferential to those that are most like themselves, or said differently, discriminates against those that are not like their group (McNamara et al., 2004). Cultural and organization stereotypes alike are defined as beliefs shared within communities and population groups’ prejudices about people who are different, whether they are real or perceived

characteristics. Those in a leadership role are challenged in knowing what style of leadership to use to effectively manage their workforce (Benson & Brown 2011; Brown, 2012). Those in leadership positions are realizing there are advantages if they encourage cross-training within an organization (Cekada, 2012) outside of the main “in-group.” There is the knowledge that can be capitalized on to improve the overall efficacy of the organization of potential future leaders of multiple age groups, genders, and races. Community college presidents and other leadership within higher education have tacit and institutional knowledge that can be shared with their younger and diverse counterparts. The Ed.D. students who are looking to obtain senior leadership positions can share new methodologies and technical expertise with the community college presidents. Leaders of graduate education programs centered around education administration understand that they must address needs and expectations around collaboration, training, and specific motivators (Cekada, 2012; Cowart et al., 2014) to improve their post-graduation success. To improve mentee success, leaders need to be intentional in understanding the engagement strategies that will improve their leader-member interaction. Engagement strategies are useful in transferring knowledge.

Engagement Strategies

A workforce requires engagement and knowledge transfer strategy changes (Bardia, 2010; Mirvis, 2012). One way to encourage engagement is to ensure leadership and mentors are aware of survey information. This helps to ensure the mentorship engagement with the mentors is targeted to the need of the mentee. Gerst (2010) argued the information needs to be interpreted and analyzed with care. Survey results are statistical numbers, but qualitative research is required if one wants to understand how to get people to engage. You need to ask people what the issues are and then organize that information for action (Gerst, 2010). Leadership often plugs values

into a model and goes with a statistical number instead of taking the opportunity to ask open-ended qualitative questions. The statistical data can be useful, but it is further enhanced by understanding the meaning through the experiences of the employees. One should never assume that characteristics are all the same type. The characteristic can have positive, negative, or in some cases no effect (Gerst, 2010). The premise here is to get people to be engaged. Leadership professionals must be engaged not only with individual(s) but also committed to adding value to the overall success of the individual versus just taking a survey and acting on the highest identified factors (i.e., areas to focus on without context). The value achieved by the individual can be equated to the perceived human capital gained. Schultz (1971) described the value obtained as the learned experience that furthers a person's economic potential. Schultz described this within the context of human capital theory.

Human Capital Theory

In 1958, Jacob Mincer developed the model of earnings, "Mincer earnings function," that explained wage income as a function of schooling and professional experience (Galiakberova, 2019). His studies and research on the function of schooling, experience, and earnings that he worked on later in the 1970s built upon his initial research and helped develop the foundations and underpinning of human capital theory.

During the similar overlapping period, T. W. Schultz was another principal founder of human capital theory and 1979 Nobel Prize winner. Schultz showed that education was the most critical factor in ensuring productivity in the American economy. "Both workers and the American economy get a higher income rather due to 'human capital' (self-education and professional experience of the individual, science, and health care) than to 'real capital'" (Galiakberova, 2019, p. 411). Following in the foundational research completed by both Schultz

and Mincer, G.S. Becker showed that “human capital growth is due to many factors – professional experience, health promotion, territorial movements, active search for information” and that “education is the main source of human capital, and the amount of remuneration and the nature of vertical mobility of the individual significantly correspond to the level of education” (Galiakberova, 2019, p. 412). Although human capital may initially be thought of as a leader-member one-directional interaction, the mentor could benefit from increasing their human capital via reverse mentoring. Reverse mentoring provides the educational opportunity for the mentor, thereby increasing or at least maintaining the mentor’s productivity (Schultz, 1971).

Reverse Mentoring

Reverse mentoring was introduced in 1999 by the former chief executive of General Electric, Frankie Welch (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012). Junior employees were paired with more senior employees to assist the senior employee with acquiring new learning or new skills. Junior employees mentoring senior employees is considered reverse mentoring given that the mentor, (i.e., leader), is the younger or less tenured person, and the senior person becomes the protégé. This goes against the trend of the traditional hierarchical trend where only the senior or experienced employee mentors the younger employee. However, while reverse mentoring could be cross-generational, it is not always age-dependent (Harvey et al., 2009). Reverse mentoring as an unexpected consequence of the executive-level mentorship program could be an implementable initiative to keep the leaders (i.e., community college president leaders) engaged (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012). Mowday et al. (1982) defined organizational commitment as “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (p. 252). The benefit of a unified mentorship program would be to have participants engaged and not perpetuate a cultural divide. Finding a way to enhance engagement

now may improve the experience for community college presidents today and the students destined to be the age of community college presidents in the future. The leader-member exchange theory provides more detail regarding the dyadic relationship opportunity between the leader and the member. In this study, the relationship between community college presidents and the doctoral students participating in the mentorship program allows for a reverse mentoring relationship. It also highlights the dyadic relationship between both groups.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

Leader-member exchange can be considered a subset of social exchange theory given social exchange theory targets knowledge exchange between individuals. However, LMX is more specific in that it is a two-way relationship between a leader (e.g., community college presidents) and a subordinate (e.g., graduate students). Research often describes the dyadic relationship as either high quality or low quality. High-quality LMX characteristics would have a deeper relationship between leader and member based on mutual respect, trust, and support. Low-quality LMX would be an engagement where it would be purely task driven or required with less focus on the relationship aspect of the engagement. The executive-level mentorship program was instantiated to develop “as many high-quality relationships as possible” (Power, 2013, p. 277). High-quality LMX is also regarded as “in-group.” Power (2013) stated, “In-group followers enjoy increased job latitude, more open communications, and greater confidence from leaders” (p. 279). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1996) describe LMX as transactional and transformational and that LMX relationship results in transformative behaviors for both leader and member. Schriesheim et. al (1999) supported the presidents view and quoted (Scandura et al., 1986) describing leader-member exchange as “(a) a system of components and their relationships (b) involving both members of a dyad (c) involving interdependent patterns of

behavior and (d) sharing mutual outcome instrumentalities and (e) producing conceptions of environments, cause maps, and value” (p. 580). The transformative behavior is of interest because it helped frame the experiences of the mentors. Podsakoff et. al (1990) explained that transformational or “charismatic behaviors of the mentor are believed to have an impact on mentee outcomes because the mentees followers feel trust and respect toward the mentor and are motivated to perform” (p. 108). During the study, the LMX experience benefited from the college presidents having very positive attitudes and being very student focused. This holds promise as the presidents articulated they saw transformations in all their mentors at varying levels (Podsakoff et al., 1990).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Bass (1985) perspective was that transformational leadership causes a change in individuals and social systems. The influence on followers can measure transformational leadership, which is essential to be an effective leader. One needs to be able to have good leaders exchange experiences with the individual and the group for the group to then engage with each other. Transformational leadership strives to change organizational culture to benefit the greater whole of the group, but it also considers the benefit and the growth of the individual.

Transformational theory indicates that there are at least four elements of transformational leadership. The elements in Figure 1 include consideration for stimulation to challenge the group while encouraging innovative thinking, motivation to inspire others, influence/integrity in that they consider moral and ethical consequences of their decisions, and actions to build and maintain trust (Avolio et. al, 1991).



Figure 1. *What Distinguishes Transformational Leadership*

Source: <https://www.ckju.net/en/dossier/qualities-transformational-leaders-and-what-distinguishes-them-transactional-leaders>

Chapter Summary

This research expanded organizational and workplace research by integrating existing perspectives and creating an extended framework for fostering workplace engagement or the continuous positive organizational operation in a multigenerational workplace. Interweaving social exchange theory with LMX theory served as a lens to explore the leadership impacts on the person, their work relationships, and engagement/knowledge sharing. Leadership theory provides the conceptual framework to modify a change in leadership behavior to effect experiences and engagement within an environment (Bevill & Bracy, 2009; Constanze et al., 2012; Rowold, 2014). Leader member exchange and transformational leadership theory address the issues leaders encounter in engagement (Kaur & Verma, 2011; Rowold, 2014). When the leader exhibits transformational behavior while operating with integrity, the leader builds trust amongst their followers. The leader then creates an opportunity to foster cross-training and

social exchange, which may encourage interaction and engagement (Helyer & Lee, 2012; Houck, 2011).

Mezirow (1991) believed transformative education is primarily a cognitive process, but he also recognized that emotional changes are involved. Mezirow (1991) is one of the early founders of transformative/transformation learning following Dewey's initial introduction of the idea of reflection in 1938. Clark (1993), also a believer in transformational learning, felt that transformational learning could occur gradually or from a sudden event. Clark slightly detracted from Mezirow, since Mezirow mostly believed something tragic or substantial caused one to learn from a situation or experience. The learning theory assumes that there are two processes in which there is external interaction between the learner and their environment and internal elaboration in which new experience and behavior relate to the results of prior learning (Illeris, 2004). Mezirow (2000) believed that adult education should lead to empowerment. Adult learners are then capable of leveraging their newfound knowledge to decide whether they will alter their current assumptions, thereby changing the way they see themselves or the surroundings in which they are participatory beings (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (2000) also believed that transformation cannot happen unless the individual acts on what they have learned. The act of acknowledgment and action ties the past assumptions to new information obtained.

Employee engagement within the premise of knowledge exchange among an organization's human capital is essential to the success of future leaders. "Leadership can enhance or detract from employees' willingness to share knowledge" (Carmeli et al., 2010, p. 257). There are national and international studies that look at the discrimination of generational cohorts via ageism (Malinen & Johnston, 2013).

In explaining the perceived stereotypes and discrimination of generational cohorts, a vital part of the ageism can be reduced to in-group favoritism within the workplace. In-group favoritism lends to the theory that one is preferential to those that are most like themselves in age or stated reversely, discriminates against those that are not like their group (McNamara et al., 2016). Cultural and organizational stereotypes alike, are defined as beliefs shared within communities and population groups' prejudices about people of different ages, whether or not they are real or perceived characteristics. The changing dynamics could further magnify this issue within the workplace.

At present, researchers are trying to understand what mechanisms impact the willingness of employees to share knowledge and engage with each other. An area that holds promise, which is pursued further through this study, is the premise that leadership can have an impact on the behavior (Gordon, 2017). This study delved into the experiences of the community college presidents as they volunteered their time to mentor graduate students whom one day may assume their roles. Few studies; however, qualitatively investigate the experiences of the mentor. Semistructured interviews were used to further understand the impact of the community college presidents and their organizations based upon their own experiences and perceived benefits by serving as mentors.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The interpretive phenomenological analysis qualitative research method allowed the researcher to assess information conveyed through conversation and observed behavior in natural settings (Berkwits & Inui, 1998; Smith et al., 2009). Qualitative research also enabled the researcher to interact directly with the targeted audience and capture what is most important to the participants. The goal of this research effort was to understand the human experiences told by community college presidents who serve as mentors to graduate students “where the researcher performs an active role in the interpretive process” (Neubauer, et. al, 2019). The qualitative method directed the researcher to probe to understand the participants’ values, feelings, beliefs, and motivation for participating in the mentorship program (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). A quantitative method would not have been optimal for the evaluation and extraction of the feelings of the participants (Berkwits & Inui, 1998). Research questions help the researcher better understand the phenomenon of being studied (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017) The aim of this qualitative method research proposal was to answer the following question: What are the experiences of community college presidents based on participation in an executive-level mentorship program?

A qualitative methods approach allowed for understanding the experiences of the participants that would not normally be utilized in a quantitative research study. A qualitative study answers “what” and “how” questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017). The ontological research question helped to determine the appropriate research method. Patton (2002) stated:

A phenomenological study focuses on “...what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. One can employ a general phenomenological

perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience.” (p. 107).

The combined use of probing and including a larger panel of college presidents into the process ideally reduces the inherent bias of obtaining the experience of a much smaller subset of community college presidents. Additionally, the researcher provided a draft copy of this study to the community college presidents prior to the dissertation defense to ensure they had the opportunity to view all of the statements that were used in this study to tell their stories.

A qualitative data sample provided themes of the participants' experiences obtained via interviews that provided meaning to the information obtained. This qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to hear the experiences of the participants, and ultimately allowed the voices of those who may not otherwise had the opportunity to be heard. In this research study, the primary method of data collection was interviews allowing space to obtain experiences from community college presidents to tell their story (see Appendix A). In an interpretive phenomenological analysis method (IPA) Smith et al. (2009) stated that “we are concerned with examining subjective experience, but that is always the subjective experience of ‘something’” (p. 33).

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as a Method of Qualitative Inquiry

The researcher considered multiple qualitative approaches to capture the community college president experiences (Creswell, 2013). Ethnography is very useful in cultural anthropology or cultural sharing where you immerse yourself and experience the environment first-hand (Creswell, 2013). It was not possible for the researcher to be the president mentor or Ed.D. student as a participant observer. Narrative inquiry could have been utilized but does not get to the essence of the experience. It may have been better suited for a single individual and

this study required multiple participants (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory looks to provide an explanation or build a theory which does not take the lived experience as the main focus (Creswell, 2013). Case studies describe an event and are explanatory. It was possible to use case as the methodology, but it did not get to the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). Ultimately the researcher chose interpretive phenomenological analysis because it enabled the participants to describe their lived experience and the researcher was able to interview each president on a single case basis and then look across each president to understand the themes that emerged (Creswell, 2013). The interpretive phenomenological analysis is beneficial when individuals experience the same phenomena. The executive-level mentorship program allowed for a distinct phenomenon since all the presidents had an experience within the context of a unique program. IPA looks at how someone makes sense of life experience and enables a detailed interpretation of the account to understand the experience.

The Phenomenology is an approach began by Edmund Husserl that seeks to study the lived human experiences and the way things are perceived and appear to the consciousness...the general focus of the descriptive phenomenological approach is to examine the essence or structure of experiences in the way it occurs to our conscious. (Tuffour, 2017, p. 1). This approach is based on the philosophy of Husserl's phenomenology which involves the principles of epoché, intentional analysis and eidetic reduction. Put simply, the researcher is required to adopt a phenomenological attitude and bracket or put aside past knowledge or presuppositions (Tuffour, 2017, p. 2).

In this study the researcher bracketed out their personal experiences by providing a positionality statement and highlighted both limitation and delimiters of the study. The researcher detailed earlier in this study that they are not a community college president, nor a student in the

mentorship program. The researcher also has not been affiliated or participated in the executive-level mentorship program. The researcher followed aspects of the guideline for IPA suggested by Alase (2017). An example of the high-level steps that align with the research method is provided in Appendix A. There is a targeted view of the analysis scheme in Figure 2.

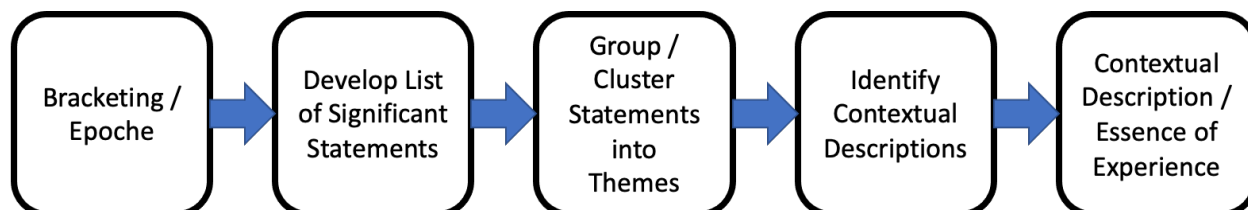


Figure 2. *Scheme for Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*

Program Selection

The mentoring program for this study is integrated within a community college leadership doctoral program that has been in existence since 1963 at North Carolina State University (Broadhurst & Bartlett, 2014). The doctoral program has evolved throughout the years and is currently a cohort-based program delivered in executive format on weekends. The program has a curriculum that is connected to professional knowledge and practice developed using the guiding principles and design concepts of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) (Bartlett et al., 2018). The program includes coursework for this aligned community college student success, including courses on community college administration and operations, workforce and talent development, organizational issues, quality improvement and change. Additionally, the program incorporates courses to support the dissertation including proposal writing, quantitative methods, qualitative methods, and evaluation. The program incorporates an internship providing the students a work-based component. The design of the mentoring program was vetted with an advisory board for a grant fund that was related to improving community college leadership development efforts.

Specifically, the mentoring program was established as a result of the redesign of the education doctorate that was funded by a grant from the John M. Belk Endowment supporting the Envisioning Excellence Program for community college leadership. The advisory board was established to provide guidance and recommendations to strengthen the delivery of the doctorate program and made the recommendation to faculty to include a mentoring component of the program. The program first incorporated a job shadowing effort that grew to the formal mentoring program. The effort provided doctoral students an opportunity to get into the field and experience community college leadership in real-world settings. This suggestion was made to strengthen the connection between the university, faculty, and community colleges and was intended to serve to build a network for students.

In 2017, plans began for creating and developing a plan for the mentoring program. The process of matching students with mentors was supported with a partnership with a nationally-known organization who provides guidance on the advancement of higher education practices and leadership. The matching process incorporates a way for faculty to understand the professional pursuits of graduate students and identifies the skill sets that they hope to develop. The matching process was conducted through a survey distributed to both the mentors and students. The survey collected their strengths and areas of expertise and identified areas in which they need developing. Thinking through potential matches, faculty considered the demographic location of both the students and mentors and worked to pair students with mentors who would complement the concepts students identified as areas of growth.

The graduate students who enroll in the doctoral degree are partnered with executive leaders, usually ones who serve as community college presidents. Students have opportunities to engage with their mentor through experiences external to the coursework. Engagement between

students and mentors usually occurs once per academic semester and included opportunities for students to attend board meetings, statewide president's meetings, and other similar experiences that they may not get through their own employment or through coursework.

A pilot of the mentoring program was launched in 2018 and was fully established by 2019. The success of the program is captured through student feedback, a collection of data annually, and from mentor feedback.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

In setting up ethical protections to protect the rights of the research participants, it was a requirement that the participants volunteered to participate signed an informed consent form. This ensured that the prospective research participants were fully informed about the procedures that were involved in the research study and had given their consent to participate. To protect the privacy of each college president research participant, each college president participant was given the option to remain anonymous via the use of pseudonyms. The coding sheets, interview data, NVivo 12 information, and other relevant information were stored on two fingerprint USB flash drives. Information can only be seen after fingerprint verification. All drives, when not in use, were stored in a password locked, fireproof safe throughout the study. IRB approval was achieved to ensure the published rules and guidelines laid out by the IRB process were followed. In utilizing the IRB rules and guidelines, it helped to protect the university, the researcher, and most of all, provided a level of ethical consideration and protection for the community college president participants.

Sample and Participants

Participants for this study were selected from community college presidents who have participated as mentors in the executive-level mentorship program. The researcher interviewed

seven community college presidents. Each president needed to have mentored at least three students to participate in the interview. Once approval was given by the institutional research board (IRB), the researcher contacted the community college presidents. The presidents represented a diverse pool regarding gender, age, and leadership background. Additionally, the community college presidents were spread geographically across North Carolina.

Interview Data Collection

The interpretive phenomenological analysis allowed “the discovery of meanings and essences in knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 27). In the Ricoeur (1967) review of Husserl, he writes that Husserl used the word act since the phenomena is the act of experiencing. The interpretive phenomenological analysis approach provided an opportunity to consider the individual or empirical experiences of the community college presidents to obtain their perspective and understand the impact based on their participation in the executive-level mentorship program. “The vast majority of IPA studies have been conducted on data obtained from semistructured interviews, and this form of data collection might be considered the exemplary one for this type of research” (Smith, 2004, p. 50). Ultimately, the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach allowed the information and themes to support or refute the research question, hypothesis, and theory. There is no single guideline or standard procedure to conduct a phenomenological study. Hence, this research was conducted using semistructured one-on-one individual interviews (Creswell, 2013), which were held via phone for convenience of the community college presidents. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. A semistructured interview protocol engaged the presidents through conversation to understand their experiences within the executive-level mentorship program. Using the open-ended questions allowed for a consistent starting point for all the interviews but also allowed the

flexibility to probe deeper into each interview based on the individual responses received by the participants.

After the coordination of an email invitation to all leaders identified to participate in the study (see Appendix D), the researcher conducted the interviews. Participants were made aware that the interviewer was pursuing his Ph.D. at North Carolina State University (NC State). Each participant was given an option to use their real name or US Airforce, US Army, US Navy, US Marine, or Coast Guard plane names after they signed the interview release form (see Appendix B) and acknowledged the interview protocol, which included the interview questions (see Appendix C). The interviews were audio recorded using GarageBand on an Apple iPad and an Apple iPhone as a secondary audio recording device. The transcribed data were imported into NVivo 12 for qualitative analysis.

The researcher kept memos and took notes to capture the essence of the interview to “ensure the retention of ideas that may otherwise be lost” (Birks et al., 2009, p. 69). Memoing allowed the researcher to capture any thoughts triggered via the interview. The memoing information, transcriptions of the audio files, and audio files were stored on secured, encrypted flash drives within a fireproof safe. Only the interviewer had access to the pseudonym key, which allows for complete de-identification of participants. The researcher aggregated the experiences and shared the results of the findings without participant identifiers. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time; however, all decided to remain in the study.

Interview Data Analysis

For data analysis, NVivo 12 was the most appropriate choice because it allowed the researcher to capture the ontological research question (Saldaña, 2016). The first step in the analysis process was to take the completed NVivo 12 transcribed files from each individual

interview and store the files on dual encrypted devices to protect from data and theft. Next, the researcher used inductive and deductive coding approaches. Saldaña (2016) stated that “provisional list of codes should be determined beforehand (deductive) to harmonize with your study’s conceptual work, paradigm, or research goals. But emergent data driven (inductive) coding choices are legitimate” (p. 65). The researcher used a priori codes that they had determined in order to complete a first pass of line-by-line hand coding on two of the first interviews. The first two interviews showed additional emergent codes and consistency in statements between presidents as the researcher evaluated at a high level by re-reading the transcripts. The researcher then repeated the first level coding process using a priori codes with all seven interviews by loading the seven transcript files into NVivo 12. Saldaña (2016) said this was “starting point to provide the researcher with analytic reads for further exploration” (p. 101). It was easier to group seven interviews while moving statements and individual lines into the high-level codes. It was also possible to group all responses by each president into each corresponding semistructured interview question. Once the first-level initial line-by-line coding had completed in NVivo 12, the researcher saw codes that had some potential for grouping. NVivo 12 was a powerful tool since it allowed the researcher to keep links and references to the source data without modifying the original data. During the next stage of second level coding, the researcher grouped codes together into subcategories to highlight the meaning derived from the transcripts. This step and the results are needed to determine if there is relevant meaning for the data that has been clustered together. Saldaña (2016) suggested this stage is where the researcher must understand which initial codes make the most sense and have “meaning”. It was possible in NVivo 12 to export the initial set of emerging themes and codes into excel to further refine themes with a data matrix that the researcher created. Creswell (2013) suggested the

method of creating a data matrix provides the researcher a “visual means of locating and identifying information for a study” (p. 175). The researcher used both Excel and NVivo 12 to finalize the seven themes that emerged for this study. The researcher also leveraged NVivo 12 to investigate the frequency of words used in the interview. The researcher used this to determine if the application could determine themes just based on word count alone versus the extensive researcher coding analysis to determine emergent.

Utilizing both the application software along with the initial hand coding analysis of the interview data without technology helped limit technology bias and researcher bias. To establish credibility, you must have the readers believe in the results that you demonstrate within your study (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2017). Additionally, a review of the counter or conflicting positions to the research was evaluated in the literature review to ensure the research did not represent just the preferred view of the researcher. The reflexivity of the researcher was also evaluated to understand biases being brought into the research and to be able to be transparent by documenting the researcher’s positionality within the proposal (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Data Integration and Interpretation (Summarizing the Data)

Once the interpretive phenomenological data analysis was complete, the first step was to create an initial matrix displaying the qualitative themes to determine the high-level qualitative results. Moustakas (1994) suggested the researcher should summarize the data and consider the implications at this state. The next key step was creating the matrix to provide a visual representation of the value to determine if the data resulted from the qualitative analysis converged or diverged from the initial research theory. The evaluation provided a complete view on whether mentorship results in a positive impact on the mentor and whether there was a perceived positive impact for the mentees. Data results were reviewed to help make a final

determination on whether the data converges, diverges, or worst case, indicates mentorship had no impact on the mentor. In this study, the data converged and there was a positive impact on the mentor. The researcher also provided a

Positionality Statement

This research provided foundation for further research to help facilitate community college president and leader interaction in critical roles with the multiple generations in which they interact through leader-member exchange. For selfish reasons, the researcher wanted to understand what the mentors' experiences and benefits are to influence others to participate in future mentorship opportunities. The researcher has not participated in the executive-level mentorship program nor does the research have a role in the program facilitation. The researcher has not participated in a formal mentorship program but has had informal mentoring within their career. The researcher has been a mentor within their workplace. These past experiences will not affect or bias the researcher in this study. The researcher's goal was to understand the essence of being a mentor to illuminate the experience in hopes others will following in the footsteps of the community college presidents that participated in this study. After completing the Ph.D., the researcher will be approaching the age of the some of the current community college presidents. The researcher will have obtained four university degrees, various job certifications, and gained a wealth of tacit knowledge. The desire would be to continue contributing to the corporate and educational arena throughout the transition to the age of the traditional Baby Boomers today. The desire to give back will not be for financial rewards or to climb the corporate ladder but to continue being engaged in the forefront of technology, continued learning, knowledge exchange, and continuous social interaction.

Limitations

Limitations for this study include both methodological and research perspectives. In relation to sample size and external validity, the reader should take into consideration that studying college presidents within an executive-level mentorship program only represents a small sample size of community college presidents in North Carolina. Additionally, the data for this study was self-reported in interviews. The self-reported data is limited by the accuracy and honesty of the participant responses and unaccounted for outside factors that may bias their current responses. Specific issues with this can include exaggerations and selective memory. Due to the size of the mentoring program and access to mentors, the researcher was not able to select how long the mentors had mentored. The researcher was also not able to supply information that could identify a president. There are also inherent biases in the interpretation of the interview data. Although there were steps taken via member checking, the author still held the final evaluation of the data. It would be advised to consider other institutions and sample locations within the United States for a more thorough investigation and diversity of responses. In broadening the pool of national participants, there is an increased likelihood of generalizable results for all schools. Finally, the data for this study was collected during the summer of 2020 when the world was being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Delimitations

Within this research study, there are delimitations the reader needs to understand the analysis of findings and their meanings. This research included seven community college presidents across North Carolina. The presidents participated in the same executive-level mentoring program. Each of the presidents needed to have mentored three community college students or are currently mentoring students as part of the executive-level mentoring program.

All the community college presidents were active presidents within the community college system. The delimitations supported the researcher's phenomenological study of the experiences of community college presidents participating in the executive-level mentorship program study (Creswell, 2013).

Chapter Summary

Chapter three provided the methodology utilized by the researcher to gather and analyze data for this study. Data were obtained via semistructured interviews of seven community college presidents. The findings and explanation of the results are reflected in chapters four and five. It is important to look at the research and literature review that challenges the conclusion to show that alternative views were considered and accounted for throughout the research study. This added to the validity and trustworthiness of the research and the researcher.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This interpretive phenomenological study examined the experiences of community college presidents participating in the executive-level mentorship program. The researcher sought to understand the shared experiences of community college presidents and the impact their service as a mentor has had upon their own understanding of the leadership roles they represent. The researcher also sought to better understand the impact on each president as a leader expressed centering around the outcomes which may ultimately influence the graduate students in which they mentored. The research findings were derived from semistructured interviews with seven community college presidents. The community college presidents represented all three regions of North Carolina, which included the Coastal Plains (East), Piedmont (Central), and the Mountain area (West). The community college president participants' responses have been masked to protect their identities, which allowed them to provide open and honest responses to the interview questions and provided additional relevant details helpful in identifying themes. The college presidents were also vocal in articulating recommendations for improvements in the executive-level mentorship program and considerations for future research.

North Carolina's Regions



Figure 3. *Community College Regions Represented in the Study*

Source: <https://www.slideshare.net/mikedunton/north-carolina-geography>

Participants

The participant profile in the study represented seven community college presidents who agreed to participate in the study and who had been or are currently serving as mentors within the program. The community college presidents represented all four regions of North Carolina in Figure 3. These participants represented different regions, including rural and dense population areas, allowing the researcher to gather data about common and unique experiences. The information used to identify each participant as shown in Table 1. The table was used to align each interview and participant back to the statements and perspective in the finding and within the data analysis to determine the themes from each of their experiences. Although not represented in the identifier table below, the college presidents represented multiple races, age groups, and genders, which also helped to create a diverse perspective outside of regional differences. Additionally, the community college president experiences varied by individual along with a varying degree of experience in providing mentorship to graduate students in the executive-level mentorship program and acting as a mentor within their careers. The researcher

intentionally chose androgynous names that are gender-neutral, further removing the link to the identities of the presidents.

Table 1

Participant Identifiers

Interview Date	Participant Name	Pseudonym Name	Airplane Name
August 04, 2020	CCP1	Frankie	WC-135 Phoenix
August 14, 2020	CCP2	Charlie	B-2 Spirit
August 19, 2020	CCP3	Sidney	A-10 Warthog
August 24, 2020	CCP4	Reilly	B-52 Stratofortress
August 28, 2020	CCP5	Robin	C-130 Hercules
August 31, 2020	CCP6	Finley	C-17 Globemaster
September 2, 2020	CCP7	Toni	Air Force One

Results

To maintain the confidentiality of the community college presidents, the participants were given the following pseudonyms Frankie “WC-135 Phoenix”, Charlie “B-2 Spirit”, Sidney A-10 “Warthog”, Reilly B-52 “Stratofortress”, Robin “C-130 Hercules”, Finley “C-17 Globemaster”, and Toni “Air Force One”. The researcher will first provide individual descriptions of the participants. The researcher will then articulate the themes derived based on community college presidents’ interviews.

Individual Textual Descriptions

The individual textual descriptions are a combination of the background from each participant for the reader to understand the background of the presidents (Moustakas, 1994). The rich text allows the reader to have a perspective on each president’s individual background and better understand what may have influenced the president’s responses that culminated into the

final themes. The background of each president is provided at a level that is general enough to keep them unidentifiable and gives the reader non-aggregated responses of their experiences.

Frankie “WC-135 Phoenix”

Frankie is a community college president who was late in their career and close to retirement. Frankie started their academic life earning a business-related degree then proceeding to a post-graduate degree. Frankie worked in various positions serving the public before changing their focus to serving the public within the arena as a community college president. As a president, Frankie has led an aggressive campaign to update the facilities at the campus, including the construction of new buildings. The goal was to update the campus to bring the school into the 21st-century by building programs at their college. Frankie has worked tirelessly to continue to work to meet the challenges due to a transitioning economy. In this rural region, the training philosophy of the school needed to change so students can get jobs that are in demand. Another example provided was the creation of career pathways that provide students opportunities to create economic mobility, with examples of students earning more than their parents were making combined. Frankie indicated several programs that started within their tenure, benefiting students in their career aspirations. Additionally, Frankie has been able to partner with a local university to establish a joint 4-year program, further enabling the local students’ potential success to further themselves and take them farther than they are today.

Throughout the years, Frankie served the citizens of the county, striving to improve the quality of their lives. Frankie has also had stints working outside of academic positions. Frankie had always expressed having a sense of belonging and an obligation to give back to the community through some level of public service. Frankie approached public service in different ways throughout their career before assuming the presidency. Frankie stated, “Public service is

not easy, but it is a wonderful thing. I am honored and humbled to serve.” Frankie also articulated that serving as a mentor was a nice detour. The mentorship allowed them to help get away from college and personal life and meet face to face with the mentees to get to know them better and provide guidance and personal perspective. They felt good taking the mentees to meet the legislative governing board, specifically the community college governance legislative leaders and speaker of the house. Frankie felt those experiences gave the mentee’s experience beyond their immediate college campus focuses.

Frankie also felt that being offsite allowed them to give their mentees a broader understanding of how community college policy is decided, along with the tradeoffs that are considered in governing meetings. Frankie indicated that the mentees were initially intimidated by the presidency status and were reluctant to engage, so it took additional time to earn their trust. Frankie worked hard to help them realize that Frankie is an ordinary person just like the mentees and that Frankie has been in their shoes needing the guidance of a mentor. Frankie ultimately felt that the mentorship re-energized them as a mentor. It was nice to get to know other people on a personal level. The experience was inspiring to connect with doctoral students, especially having the opportunity to guide them and potentially make their ascent to a leadership position easier based on the knowledge Frankie transferred. Frankie stated they are invested in mentoring potential leaders because a better community leads to a better state. Frankie hoped that the knowledge and experiences they provided would help the mentors accomplish their goals.

Charlie “B-2 Spirit”

Charlie started their initial education and completed multiple degrees before attending graduate-level degrees. Charlie has dedicated their life and career to education beyond K-12.

Their dedication and focus for student outcomes allowed Charlie to rise through administrative ranks while balancing life and work. Their hard work paid off with them obtaining multiple senior leadership positions within the community college system. Charlie ultimately earned multiple presidency positions in their career. The move and opportunity allowed Charlie to bring a strategic focus on student success, enrollment management, and aligning academic programs to increase access. Like Reilly and Sidney, Charlie concentrated on construction and renovation plans for the community college. Charlie believes in building relationships within the county. Charlie has a laser-sharp focus on being future-focused and has developed a new vision and strategic plan for the college in collective engagements with their faculty, staff, and students. Charlie is committed to a vision that is constituent-engaged, transparent, and student-focused. Charlie is guided by their faith in decision-making and overall treatment of the people in which they interact. The interview notes the researcher took indicated Charlie is a genuine person who is passionate about their work and willing to provide any assistance that is needed to advance student outcomes. Charlie also took time out of their day after the interview to provide recommendations and thoughts to the researcher and general encouragement on the steps to complete and be intentional every day to continue making progress on this dissertation until it was completed. Charlie also was willing to have follow-up conversations if needed.

Charlie exclaimed:

I think as leaders, you have to do it. If you're in any way self-reflective after all these years, I hope most leaders will say that it's very situational. I think as a leader...it should be very collaborative, both internal to the faculty and staff, but also to the multi-stakeholders that have an investment in what we do and really the outcomes of what we do. So, you know, I tend to be highly collaborative. I ask a lot of questions. My team

would tell you; it is not the Socratic method as they use in law school, I promise. But sometimes they might feel that way. It really is a coaching, teaching, mentoring kind of style. I want to know how they think and want to know how they're prepared to come to me with your thoughts and recommendations as leaders to make us a better institution...I'm going to eventually retire. And it's closer than most people think sometimes. And one of the goals I have as a leader is that I want to know that I've worked with people so that they can go on to continue to be successful. That's what we do with our students. I really take what we say we are about with our students and try to implement that in my leadership style with my team. My goal is to grow them to be the next generation of tremendous leaders for community colleges across our country and North Carolina.

Sidney A-10 "Warthog"

Sidney has benefited from a long tenure in North Carolina, given they spent a considerable amount of their time in college investing in the academic educational learning system in North Carolina. Like other community college presidents, Sidney started their college presidency having a mixed background. It is apparent that having a varied college background does not hamper the presidents' pursuit of excellence in obtaining a presidency role. Sidney spent a portion of their early career supporting and excelling in the K-12 education system. Sidney advanced through multiple roles in K-12. Like other community college presidents, the K-12 provided a training ground to better understand the needs of the K-12 student and ways that they could help influence the outcomes of those students that need the community college system as a launch point to better their student outcomes. Sidney has thrived in their presidency role, contributing to their county, and working to improve the economic mobility of those within the

community that Sidney serves. Sidney is a person whose leadership has resulted in many improvements to their community college. The efforts and dedication have benefited the entire community and the county in which Sidney resides. Sidney exclaimed:

You know, I was drawn in by the mission of the community college system and of K-12. K-12 schools clearly are playing a role in preparing the youth for their future. If you provide that real strong foundation that's going to give kids opportunities to go and pursue higher education and have a better life. But I really saw the economic struggle that we were in.

Sidney was born and raised in the county. Sidney reached the point where they were going to probably make one more transition within their career that would be an opportunity to kind of get into a new challenge. They highlighted:

The mission of the community college system, to really be able to impact that economic well-being of our community and to see in a real tangible way student who were coming out of poverty in the K-12 system that I've been working in and to be able to see them go from, living in poverty and not having a skillset, to graduating in two years with a nursing degree, for example, and going out making \$50,000 a year more than probably their parents made combined. That was appealing to me and being able to be involved in planning to try to make those improvements in our community. That is why I made this entry into the community college presidency. I feel like I've been blessed in a lot of ways. I've had the opportunity to work with good people who have been good mentors to me throughout my life. If there is something that I've learned along the way, through a lot of varied experiences and if I can shed a little light on something for students in the doctoral program, I was happy to do it.

Reilly B-52 “Stratofortress”

Reilly followed a similar theme to some of the other community college presidents spending all or most of the early academic college learning occurring in the North Carolina college education system. In keeping with a similar theme, Reilly has varied degrees with different focuses. Reilly has internal and external roles in the community college system. With the community college system, Reilly has held multiple administrative roles. Each subsequent role allowed Reilly to build on those experiences and allowed them to make long lasting and consistent impacts to the community college areas within and external to North Carolina. Reilly understood that to maximize the success of the community college and their respective students they needed to partner with a local university or to provide a tract for success for a particular learning area. This has been successful and a feather in their cap given the success. Watching students excel and achieving economic mobility is rewarding to Reilly. Reilly wants their community college to be a leader in workforce training and economic development. Reilly’s experiences has taught them about leadership. Reilly’s experiences helped them realize that relationship building can pay dividends in the future. Reilly has strong collaboration and relationship-building skills. Reilly suggested both are critical to understanding a community college’s service area, its populations, its needs, and then delivering community-based education. Reilly also highlighted something that resonated with the researcher in that you need to address the needs of culturally, socially, and diverse communities. Reilly indicated:

Their community college mission is consistent with community colleges pretty much across the nation, definitely within the state of North Carolina. Specifically, our mission is to provide comprehensive educational programs and services to advance diverse populations and empower lifelong learners. Put simply, it is to provide the education,

training and services and data and the support that goes along with that for people to really be successful....Not just a helping hand to get through, but to really get into the door. So, this whole thing about access and success. Access is a huge part of success. Yes, getting here and really helping students to feel like they belong on a college campus and to make them feel comfortable. The support is as critical as financial support. We council on housing and food insecurity, you name it.

Robin “C-130 Hercules”

Robin had an interesting bachelor’s degree and a unique perspective on leveraging their undergraduate pursuits and how they leveraged their undergraduate and graduate degrees to pursue leadership positions in education. Robin has dedicated their career to serving the college system and student outcomes. Robin has pursued leadership positions at various community colleges and universities, honing their craft. During the interview, it was apparent that both Charlie and Robin were kindred spirits in their endless pursuit of living by their religious principles. In the interview, Robin expressed the importance of giving back to individual students, the community college system, and their respective communities. In speaking to Robin, one feels that they are a selfless servant leader, never losing sight of the teaching of the Bible and simply treating people well. Robin felt privileged and blessed to be a community college president and utilizes their role to affect change within their community as an avid volunteer of their own time. Through the interview, the researcher understood that Robin believes the needs of the many outweigh those of the few. Robin serves the many, and the few, but focuses on the most significant impact so that their community flourishes. Robin indicated:

One principle I learned was that ‘the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few.’

Mr. Spock, who was the Executive Officer and 2nd in command of the Star-Ship

Enterprise, decided to perform a task that would save the lives of all those on the ship but would undoubtedly end his own. For his character, it was the logical choice to make. But for everyone else whom he left behind it was an unselfish, heroic act. For a leader it is the right course of action to put aside one's own biases and/or the special interests of small groups and make an objective decision that benefits the majority of those being served for the greater good. This is sometimes easier said than done. When we get elected to or selected for a position of leadership we are bombarded with pressure from constituents, contributors, family, friends, special interest groups, and our own opinions and perspective regarding an important matter...Having and using principles to help guide us toward the right decision is paramount. Using a four-way test to guide our decision-making, it asks each of us to test what we think, say, or do to determine first: is it the truth? Second, is it fair to all concerned? Third, will it build goodwill and better friendships? And fourth, will it be beneficial to all concerned? At the college, we use our Mission Statement, College Values, and Strategic Plan to guide our decision-making. Personally, I believe that the best source for principle-centered leadership and decision-making is the Bible. Regardless of where one may extract principles to guide one's decision-making, the ultimate goal is to use them consistently to serve others and benefit many, not just yourself or a few individuals.

Robin's responses support that they are a proponent of participatory leadership. Robin emphasized it is important for individuals, particularly if we're going to train them, to be good leaders going forward.

You have to train them. That there is more to life in decision making than just your own perspective by bringing others. You create a synergy that promotes better decision

making. By including data, you also reassure that the decision making is based on sound factual information that usually leads to a better decision. On the other side. So, if people have input on how to govern the institution, then they have more buy in. They see it more as their institution and they'll have a vested interest in its success along with the success of those that they are serving.

Finley "C-17 Globemaster"

Finley's academic career encompasses many areas in the community college system. Finley has excelled in all avenues in which they have achieved at various executive levels within the community college system. Like many other presidents, Finley started their undergraduate training in an area that was not specifically focused on education or student outcomes. However, like many other presidents, Finley obtained their doctorate and leveraged their bachelor-focused studies to become an effective educator to better relate to the students in their community. Finley volunteers their time to local charities and knows that concentrating their time on various causes within their community can raise the economic impact on the entire community. Finley is often sought out online via email, via LinkedIn, personal phone, and through her official channels as a community college president. Finley knows this can be exhausting, but they are energized with the opportunity to help people who may have a quick question or may be stuck in their careers and need some advice on how they can improve their personal situations. Like Frankie and Robin, Finley has been a servant leader and has dedicated their life to public service contributing to the community's well-being within their official role as a community college president. Finley also shares their dedication to their personal obligation to the committee colleges and surrounding counties while ensuring they serve a higher power and fulfilling their tithes.

I believe in an extremely collaborative approach. I feel like it is critical for people who are in leadership positions to have a voice in the decision-making process and that we are able to work collectively. I think that is the kind of leadership style that I model internally and externally as we identify strategic partners to solve goals that we have in common for. Particularly in a community where resources are limited, it only makes sense for us to be collaborative in our approach. The downside for that is that it often takes a little longer to make decisions. But I think that when those decisions are made, I believe that they are stronger, and they are probably better thought out than if this were simply a hierarchical sort of leadership...or just simply come down from the top approach.

Toni “Air Force One”

Toni’s undergraduate degree focus may overlap Finley’s; however, the journey was not as linear as Finley’s, and it has given Toni a greater appreciation for the effort it takes to achieve a community college degree and transition to a 4-year university. Toni explained that the community college system likely saved his life. The community college gave him the direction that he had not received in high school and very likely may not have received had an acquaintance and the community college and the structure and direction those within the community college provided. It was more than the guidance, but as Reilly emphasized in their interview, beyond the financial aspect, sometimes people need a helping hand, and more importantly, they need to feel like they belong on campus and feel they are supposed to be there. Toni has held multiple community college positions, and like Finley and Frankie, Toni started their initial careers in a field outside of education. Toni indicated that their leadership style is participatory, composed, and as transparent as possible. Toni strives to remove obstacles, to allow those within the organization to do extraordinary things by removing impediments that

would hamper success. Toni seeks as much input as possible from faculty and staff and Toni's direct reports. Toni also values communication. Toni was very complimentary of the community college system and believed it gave them purpose. Tony highlighted that their journey taught them the importance of having the right mindset and continuous improvement. These qualities remain evident in Toni's core and something Toni instills in their staff to ensure they continuously meet the students' and community needs. Toni passionately stated:

My parents didn't complete bachelor's degree studies. So technically, I'm a first-generation college student, and didn't know what I was going to do. The community college really provided direction in my life....I wanted to stay in the community college world because the community college world is part of what helped me shape my life. And if it weren't for the community college, I really don't know how my life would have turned out. So, my goal was to try to become a leader of an organization to allow me to help shape and help the organization be as impactful to as many students like that, like the community college was for me. So, it truly was a purposeful decision for me to stay in the community college world, but one that hopefully allows me to help people change their life.

My leadership style is one that is participatory and composed, as transparent as is possible in that I try to make it my mission, my goal to remove obstacles, to allow those within the organization to truly, truly do special things. So, I seek input as much as possible from our faculty and staff, from my direct reports. I value communication. I encourage people to come and speak with me. Just a couple hours ago, I had a faculty member pop into my office and want to talk about what's going on in [their] life. So, I really appreciate that. I try to create that standard so that people within the organization

are not afraid. Senior administration trusts the direction the college is headed and trusts when they are told something directly from me that it's the truth and that they can rely upon....I wanted to stay in the community college world because the community college world is part of what helped me shape my life. And if it weren't for the community college, I really don't know how my life would have turned out. So, my goal was to try to become a leader of an organization to allow me to help shape and help the organization be as impactful to as many students like that, like the community college was for me. So, it was a purposeful decision for me to stay in the community college world, but one that hopefully allows me. To help many people change their life.

The research presented in this study emanated from seven semistructured interviews that transpired over the period of two months. In the data analysis of the information derived from the interviews, the researcher bracketed out their personal biases through a positionality statement to concentrate their full efforts on understanding the phenomenon the participants experienced in the study. Illuminating and setting aside the researcher's background and biases (Creswell, 2013) aligns with the interpretive phenomenological data analysis procedure described by Alase (2017). The researcher utilized this data approach when analyzing the data to describe the experiences within the phenomenon. The researcher uploaded the transcribed data to NVivo 12 to represent the data better visually during the analysis. The researcher did first level coding of the initial data utilizing a priori codes and set these up as code buckets. This method allowed for data to be organized into these initial buckets while maintaining a direct link to the individual interview responses within the interview file and the location within the interview where the responses occurred. Beginning with first level coding, using these initial codes of the preliminary data, allowed for "further exploration" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 101) into additional codes not originally

thought of before research study began. During the next phase of the coding analysis, additional code groups were derived, and subcategories of codes were created for code groups where codes overlapped. During this portion of the analysis, similar themes began to emerge. Saldaña (2016) suggested that these themes result in the most relevant categories. These code groups led to the seven final themes in Table 2 that were derived using this coding analysis procedure.

Research Question

The single defining question the research study centered around asked: What are the experiences of community college presidents based on participation in an executive-level mentorship program? The question sought to understand the essence of the participants' experiences within the phenomena of mentoring graduate students who were enrolled in a graduate program with a focus on community college leadership. The analysis of the seven semistructured interviews yielded seven major themes.

Table 2

Derived Themes

Theme	Theme Description
Theme 1	Positive Organizational Impact
Theme 2	Leadership Style
Theme 3	Transforming Student Lives
Theme 4	Obligation to Train Future Leaders
Theme 5	Spiritual Fulfillment
Theme 6	Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment
Theme 7	Giving Back to the Community

Themes

The community college presidents serving in executive mentor roles were consistent in that their actions and interactions were supportive of their organizational mission. The presidents felt an obligation to Transforming Student Lives to improve their student socioeconomic success

from where they are to where they could be. There was a strong theme across the interview participants that centered around the experience of Giving Back to The Community knowing that helping one person has a greater impact to those whom they interact within their journey. In a similar theme was the aspect of relationship building and the perceived obligation to Train Future Leaders and the feeling of accomplishment. One area that surprised the researcher was a very strong and consistent theme of Spiritual Fulfillment in what presidents described as another form of tithing outside of their house of worship. As career professionals, the presidents felt that participating as a mentor was critical in reinforcing their Leadership Style and their professional growth as a leader. The presidents' advocacy for lifelong learning extended not only in their recommendations to the mentees but was fundamental in the positive experience in Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment when interacting with students. The last theme is a culmination of the prior themes where the presidents utilized their presidency to focus on Giving Back to the Community. Throughout the interview and after analyzing the themes that emerged, there were considerations from the community college presidents' experiences on recommendations that could preserve or enhance the experiences for future mentor and mentee interactions within the mentorship program.

Positive Organizational Impact

Every community college president understood and exemplified their true mission in their organization is to further student success; however, they also indicated there was value for their organization. There was an indirect impact in that the presidents gained new knowledge to bring back to their respective community colleges, and there was a perceived reputation gain by participating in the mentorship program collaboration. Sidney "A-10 Warthog" stated in their interview:

I told my board chairman, the way my contract works is if I am going to engage with any kind of external employment...I've got to connect with him to get [the chairman's] approval for that. So, when I was talking to him about this program...I told him I think it's good for the institution and that it's a feather in the cap of the community college that the president is mentoring [graduate] students.... It says something positive about our institution that [the university] is asking for me to serve as a mentor to their graduate students, so just that by itself was a positive. But then beyond that, I talked to him about just being able to learn. It's been in that environment of continual learning and hearing more of what the latest research is or what good ideas they're implementing at their respective institutions. So, there's definitely an institutional gain to it from my perspective.

The positive impact to self and to the organization was also stressed in another president interview. They framed the importance of professional development and the benefit in engaging with an institution outside of their community college. The mentorship experience enabled them to not only receive benefits to apply to their own college but the ability to give back and have the feeling of gratification.

Toni "Air Force One" stated, "It's really helped me remain engaged within professional development" and they indicated it was professional development from the prospective as a community college administrator:

It just kind of organically occurred the way I've become involved with [the university]...If my association with [the university] hadn't happened through the present program, I probably would have never been connected with a college of education just with my background...So, it really has helped me become engaged with higher education

for community college leaders and that means a lot to me...this has really helped me provide some relevant experience to those who may benefit from it...I think is then one of the most beneficial aspects for me. But then, it is also that giving back factor... just to continue to try to help people and give back to people who may be like I was and want some guidance and need some help in what the next steps are and that kind of thing. So that was impactful as well.

Multiple presidents were very complimentary regarding their relationship with their mentees in that there was a reverse benefit in that there was knowledge transfer from mentee to mentor. The mentee had experience in specific implementations that the community college presidents learned would be of benefit to their own institutions. This resulted in a positive impact for the institution and in knowledge gained by the community college president.

Reilly “B-52 Stratofortress” stated:

I learned about how they were doing some things at their campuses and their colleges. And I said, well, I could try that here. You know, it could be beneficial here. Not only that, some of what they [the mentees] were studying in school was a good refresher...it was a win-win on both sides...I borrowed some things from them that we applied here, and they had the option to interface with some of the staff here [community college]. Of course, they [president’s staff] may have learned something from them as well...It made me feel like I had value. I guess they helped me in more ways than I know. One way is, as I have positions become available, I know where to go. They are a recruiting source for me.

The positive impact to the organization was articulated by Finley “C-17 Globemaster” in their description of the knowledge sharing experienced in the mentorship program. The college

president thoroughly described the aspect of “panning for gold” in the ability to get outside guidance to benefit their organization through their interactions with the mentees. The organization benefited from essentially using best practices being done in other community colleges that they may not have considered. Finley “C-17 Globemaster” shared:

...as we talk through different scenarios about lack of funding in a particular area and what’s the best strategy...Those have been really powerful conversations. I feel like I’ve grown from hearing the various strategies that my mentees are seeing modeled at their respective organizations or that they personally helped drive their respective organizations. So, you know, I feel like this is part of my professional development as well.

The President went on to say later:

I feel like I’m always panning for gold when I’m interacting with my mentees...We call it R and D or rip off and duplicate. And so sometimes I’ll hear one of my mentees say, well, yeah, we use this form or this process...It’s not surprising to me at all for me to say, “hey, would you send me a link to that? Or would you share that article with me that you referenced or share the book? You know that you’ve just read the [book] that you quoted from it. Will you share that with me?” That happens. That happens pretty regularly. And so those are things that ultimately come back and help my organization.

Leadership Style

Transformational leadership was the lens this study used to assess the leadership style and effectiveness of the presidents. In the interviews with the community college presidents, they all described their respective leadership styles that guided not only the interaction with the mentees in their mentorship but also how they utilized the same or similar leadership styles to

engage with their staff within their respective community college institutions. All the leaders had overlapping leadership styles and engagement strategies; however, only two participants specifically referenced how their styles aligned with being a transformational leader or democratic/situational leader. The remaining community college presidents saw their leadership as collaborative, participatory, trusting, and transparent. Ironically, as described in chapter two, transformational leadership relies on individuals being transparent, inclusive, collaborative, and participatory for those within a leadership environment. In the literature review in chapter two, Rowold (2014) explains that there is a necessity to build in transformational leadership into management practices to maximize performance and engagement. Although not specifically referenced by the remaining five participants, they all were very closely aligned in their engagement strategy with building a relationship with their staff and mentees rather than having a dictatorship or top-down leadership approach. Excerpts from the college community college presidents are included below. Note the examples provided give the reader a sense of the styles employed by the participants. It was important to understand the frame of mind of how the community college presidents perceive leadership to provide the framework around the other themes that emerged in this research study. Reilly “B-52 Stratofortress” highlighted:

Transformational leadership - Seemed to fit very well with [the mentees] because of the leadership that I employ... I look at people in terms of the skills that they bring to the table...another piece that goes with that is what we call emotional intelligence... Not only did my mentees teach and here from me, but they also learned from [mentee group peers], and I learned things from them just like they learned things from me. So, we had just an incredible group of mentees that I couldn't ask for [in] a better group. It was awesome.

Finley “C-17 Globemaster” stressed the importance of collaboration in leadership. In the literature within chapter two it explained the dynamics of human capital and social capital in which there needs to be attention and an intentional focus to be aware of both. (Ali, et. al, 2016). The president explained this style of leadership allows for better decisions to be made. They stated, “in a rural community where resources are short and limited, it only makes sense for us to be collaborative in our approach.” These are some of the leadership qualities they emphasized in their relationship with the mentees and was a reason they were energized by having the opportunities to share their view with mentees to help shape their perspective. They also explained there are consequences to collaborative leadership:

The downside for that is that it often takes a little longer to make decisions. But I think that when those decisions are made, I think I believe that they are stronger, and they are probably better thought out than if this were simply a hierarchical sort of leadership organization where this isn’t just simply come down from the top.

Finley “C-17 Globemaster” said:

I think providing these holistic kinds of opportunities for individual students helps people become aware of cultural opportunity. I feel like those are all things that are of equal importance. I feel like it is critical for the people who are in leadership positions to have a voice in our decision-making process and that we are able to work collectively. And I think that the kind of leadership style that I model internally and externally as we identify strategic partners...goals that we have in common.

In the interview with Toni “Air Force One,” they indicated that they try to create the standard so that people within the organization are not afraid. Their senior administration trusts the direction the college is headed and that their staff trusts when they are told something directly

from their president that it is the truth and that they can rely upon that. Bardia (2010) explained the importance of consistent and effective communications. The presidents understood communication was paramount in gaining the trust of their staff. The presidents exemplified these same traits in their relationship with their mentees following the similar principle within their mentorship experience. They encouraged their mentees to reach out to them freely as they do with their own staff. They enjoyed the interaction to be able to help provide their knowledge and experience to remove obstacles not only for their mentee relationship but also their staff members. The president went on later to say:

My leadership style is one that is participatory, composed, and as transparent as possible...I try to make it my mission, my goal to remove obstacles, to allow those within the organization to truly do special things...I seek input as much as possible from our faculty and staff, from my direct reports. I value communication and once a month under normal circumstances, I'm having a call/meeting with all faculty and staff, letting them know directly from me what's happening. I encourage people to come and speak with me. Just a couple hours ago, I had a faculty member pop into my office and want to talk about what's going on in her life. So, I really, really appreciate that.

The remaining presidents also provided their perspective around leadership styles they employ and how that drives their interaction with their staff and their mentees. Sidney "A-10 Warthog" said, "In organizational leadership, they talked about a theory of situational leadership. It has always made a lot of sense to me and been my driving force."

Robin "C-130 Hercules" stated, "I am a proponent of participatory leadership. So, we're really in an inclusive leadership style." All the presidents in this research understood the value of requiring input from those being led whether it was from their employees or mentees. These

qualities were stressed in wanting the mentees to understand and exemplify when they become community college senior leaders.

Transforming Student Lives

The mission of community colleges in North Carolina is to “improve the lives and well-being of individuals” by partnering with business and collaborating with the University of North Carolina System, private colleges, and universities (North Carolina Community College System, 2021, Mission & History section). They also provide services to communities while also maximizing student success.

During the interviews, the presidents indicated that they were committed to the North Carolina community college mission. They felt that their commitment to community college students was consistent with the goals and behaviors that they followed as they mentored the graduate students in the executive-level mentorship program. Reilly “B-52 Stratofortress” specifically stated they strive to provide comprehensive educational programs and services to advance diverse populations and empower lifelong learners. The president emphasized that they were committed to “advancing a diverse population and empowering lifelong learners...for people to really be successful in the 21st century.” In another interview, Charlie “B-2 Spirit” reiterated the importance of the mission to transform student lives. They explained that the mentorship experience is why they accepted the opportunity to be a mentor in the executive-level mentorship program. The connection they felt with their mentees was relational and they felt that they were truly invested in the life change of the mentees.

Sidney “A-10 Warthog” declared that their mission is to transform students’ lives to help impact the community. They stated:

One of the reasons you become both a formal and informal mentor is because you care about your work and you care about the mission of your work... It always feels good when you think you can help somebody right now...It's not transactional, it's relational. It makes me feel great that I have three more people who know how to reach me and reach out to me if I can ever be a help to them. I wouldn't be in this work if I'm not invested in making sure that people are successful in watching their life change. And so, it's always an inspiration to me because I hear their stories.

The president continued to emphasize that they just try to keep people motivated when you're mentoring to try to really help them hit their goal. Sidney "A-10 Warthog" stated, "One method implored was to bring the graduate students to their institution to have an experience with all different types of staff and faculty because we want to give them an experience as part of their journey to make them better, certainly to gain knowledge, but also to understand."

There were two unique aspects that two community college presidents shared. One was to transform student lives to "arm them" with the information they need to make better career decisions and to take risks sometimes. One president stated:

I think just having come up through the system, I've never been afraid to take a chance and to see if an opportunity is going to pay off or not. So that mentality is one that I try to encourage with students when I mentor them.

In this perspective the college president concentrated on encouraging their mentees to take risks and to try things with the knowledge that sometimes even college presidents made successful and unsuccessful decisions during their career, but they were never afraid to try. Helping fortify the mentees' mental state to make a decision explaining how making a bad decision did not prevent the college presidents from obtaining their current position. Sidney "A-10 Warthog" also shared

that they felt really connected in being able to share their personal experiences in hoping it will transform the mental state of their mentees and encourage them to pursue their career aspirations. Robin “C-130 Hercules” stated they enjoyed the experience of providing real-world examples of their lived experience and helping them understand the sacrifices you make to become and serve as a college president. They felt this was important to ensure the college presidency is the career path mentees truly want to pursue.

The president also went on to say that some of the students recalibrate or reevaluate their original plans for succession, moving up in an organization, moving out of an organization, or aspiring to be a community college president or vice president.

So, it helps to sit down to introspect...I have seen them change direction based on some of the information that we have shared with them. Being a college president, it might sound and look glamorous, but if your personal time is important to you and if it's important to you to have downtime or to be able to do what you think you want to do all the time, then that's not the line [of work] I feel is for you, because you're always in a fishbowl. You're always being watched and scrutinized in every decision. You're never off duty, even though you may not be working legally on the clock or literally on the clock. You're always a president, regardless of where you are and what you're doing. And you will be sought out for your guidance and/or decision making. So, I have seen those types of discussions take place with my mentees...it has caused them to really introspect and reevaluate what they wanted to be in life and what they want to do.... That is a good thing because we want people to be on the right pathway.

Additionally, Robin “C-130 Hercules” explained one of the best ways to transform the mentees lives and fully leverage the mentorship opportunity is to allow them to “get an

opportunity to mentally experience it and make adjustments prior to having to experience it themselves. Hopefully, again, making higher-level and better types of decision making because they've gotten more input from another perspective other than their own.”

Reilly “B-52 Stratofortress” talked about their experiences with the mentees and the need to interact with them to provide them access to people and share personal anecdotes of lived experiences to shape the mentees’ perspectives beyond their current knowledge.

Sometimes just a helping hand and meeting the mentees where they are. Sometimes they just need a helping hand to get through, and to get into the door...Access is a huge part of success! To look in terms of the future and how I can help people see the bigger picture.

Obligation to Train Future Leaders

In an American Council on Education (ACE) poll college presidents indicated one concern that they had was cultivating leadership in others (ACE, 2017). The community college presidents in this study highlighted there is a significant turnover in the number of presidents retiring and some in this study indicated they wanted to be a part of the solution in ensuring they train future leaders that can take their place whether that is in North Carolina or somewhere within the United States. The community college presidents understood that they made mistakes in their ascent to their current roles and wanted their mentees to be transparent of things that were not successful in their ascent and experiences that were complimentary in learning that helped fuel their careers. One key aspect that the interviews highlighted is they wanted these future leaders to be thoughtful in the decisions they make as leaders, understanding that impacts are multidimensional whether it is people, diversity, type of leadership to foster collaboration, or mentoring relationships. One of the presidents indicated that at some time:

I'm going to eventually retire. I think North Carolina is probably one of the biggest community college systems where people have been retiring over the last two years. I think there's been a 50% turnover there. I think in the last five to six years, we've turned over most of the 58. Probably 46 or 47 of those colleges. Could be a little higher and a couple of searches are ongoing. And then, as I said, there's probably a handful of us that could go in the next five years if we choose to.

This was important in understanding the need to begin training leaders to take their place. They felt it was an obligation to ensure there is a pipeline so that the community college system is minimally impacted once the presidents leave. The college understood that they needed to create a safe environment for mentees to ask questions of the leaders that they desire to attain without ramifications from their own leadership chain in their institutions.

Charlie "B-2 Spirit" stated they wanted to provide an environment for knowledge sharing and for learning:

What we [mentees and me] share here, questions you have, stays with us! You know, I'm not going to go back to your manager at your institution; I'm not going to actually call your president...That would ruin the opportunity to be lifelong friends. Eventually these people (mentees) will eventually be my colleagues and they are going to run me out of business...My goal is to grow them to be the next generation of tremendous leaders for community colleges across our country.

Finley "C-17 Globemaster" indicated that they had opportunities to mentor before but this time they did it intentionally. Based on their position, it was their responsibility to train mentees and help people become aware of cultural opportunity. The president was mindful about

needing to increase diversity in leadership to be inclusive of women and people of color. The president felt like those are all things that are of equal importance. The president indicated:

This time they did mentoring very intentionally with this executive leadership program, because when I look around, I see that there's a real dearth of women in the pipeline to become college presidents. I want people with certain kinds of thinking to start emerging into those presidential leadership positions...I thought this was a great opportunity for me to implement that.

Sidney "A-10 Warthog" stated as they reflected on their own career, they acknowledged that it was not easy all the way along. They had a lot of missteps and missed opportunities along the way. They understood where the college students were in their journey. This president acknowledged:

You sort of guide using the leadership philosophy to try to meet people where they are and give them the kind of leadership that they need to be most effective and be as transparent as you can to be with the students so they can learn....If something that I've learned along the way through a lot of varied experiences can shed a little light on something for students in the [graduate] program to help them find their path, then for me, that is a real rewarding thing to be a part of. I would like to be able to talk to the student about some of my missteps, lessons learned along the way, or just about persistence. You don't get every job you apply for and you know that's OK. You're not going to. But you know what? You won't get 100 percent of all of those jobs that you never applied for...I have experience that can help them...I also don't want them to feel like I'm the sage on the stage, that has all the answers that they're looking for...I also want to spend more time engaging with them and having them learn from each other.

Another president also highlighted the concern of community college leaders with the ability to leave their posts. They articulated the need to share their knowledge and further develop future leaders. Reilly “B-52 Stratofortress” stated:

We have many community college leaders who are aging out, it is the Baby Boomer effect, we must be concerned about developing future leaders to take our places. With many years [redacted] of experience, I can save an upcoming leader a lot of trouble, a lot of time, and a lot of resources by sharing my experiences. In providing that guidance and being a sounding board for them to simply run things by...None of us got where we are along by ourselves; we need the input, the help, and assistance of others. I know I didn't get to where I am by myself by any means...We need to continue with succession planning.

Toni “Air Force One” indicated that they hope there is something that they say that will inspire the next generation of future leaders to be thoughtful in their leadership.

I also hope to serve as an encouragement to them (mentees). Their perspective aligned with the other presidents in feeling obligated to help the next generation by being transparent of the mistakes that they made along the way and wanting to help them avoid or at least mitigate the challenges.

Robin “C-130 Hercules” articulated the need to participate in succession planning. They felt this research is going to help to speak to explain why presidents do what they do and why it is important for presidents to mentor and pass on the information to those individuals who are aspiring to do more and move up in the organization or somewhere else. This president suggested that they are a proponent of participatory leadership.

It is important for our individuals [mentees], particularly if we're going to train them how to be good leaders going forward. You must train them that there is more to life and decision making than just your own perspective by bringing others into the decision. You create a synergy that promotes better decision making. By including data, you also reassure that the decision making is based on sound information that usually leads to a better decision.

Spiritual Fulfillment

One theme that resulted from the interviews and did not appear in the literature review performed by the researcher, was the perspective around spiritual fulfillment. Utilizing an interpretive phenomenological analysis research approach of semistructured interviews allowed for the participants to illustrate their lived experience. This method uncovered a theme which emphasized the spiritual aspect by some of the presidents. Nolan-Arañez (2020) wrote that transformative leadership is value based. Nolan-Arañez (2020) also went on to say that "Spirituality is a meaning-making paradigm by which life's changes can be understood and incorporated, thereby adding to a sense of purpose in life" (p. 99). No questions were asked about the presidents' religious beliefs given the sensitivity around worship; however, those who responded highlighted how their mission as a community college president enabled them to fulfill their spiritual values. Their experience of mentoring and leading others allowed for their spiritual fulfillment aligning with the principles of the Bible.

Robin "C-130 Hercules" considered that a lot of their personal leadership comes from the principles of the Bible. One of the principles in the Bible talks about the time to seed and harvest principle. The seed principle is that more of what you sow, you reap what you do...you reap the

results of those actions. The president related the principle explaining that the more you give you, the more you get back.

By giving back to these individuals, I get so much out of it that it's almost unfair in terms of what I give to them and what I get back.... This is a way for me to give back and to help to shape the future of higher education. It means that what I'm doing is meaningful. It helps to build my own self-awareness, my own self-worth, and to be able to see that something that I have said or done has really led to a positive outcome for another individual.... Everyone sees that I have helped, then that is definitely beneficial to me and my spirit.

Finley "C-17 Globemaster" also shared their religious responsibilities and the responsibility to mentor while being a collaborative leader.

How can I say that I'm a collaborative leader if...I am not interacting with others, with my mentees, that's inconsistent! That's not consistent with my values and what kind of person that I am—the kind of leader that I am. So, we do this work as part of our tithe. We do this work as part of our contribution to help make our community, our state, our country better.

Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment

The researcher's goal was to understand the experiences of the community college presidents. One question that the researcher probed deeper was why the presidents chose to mentor. Scandura et al. (1996) stated:

Each mentor's world is unique, shaped by personal, professional, and other situational motives. Even within this private world, motives for mentoring are more likely to be a kaleidoscopic mix that changes through time, rather than a single, fixed viewpoint.

Therefore, attributions about mentoring motives range from the selfish to the altruistic, the political to the organizational. (p. 51)

Based on the interviews in this research study, presidents' responses centered around their actions of being altruistic. They were able to give back to the mentees and, indirectly, they received benefits from the dyadic relationship. The presidents explained the sacrifices they made to be presidents and the obligation to improve student success. They also explained the mission of their organizations, which was also a catalyst for their willingness to engage within the mentorship program. The fulfillment the presidents achieved was perceived as continuation of their lifelong learning but even more important was their own personal feeling of doing the right thing and contributing to the success of others. Presidents described the mentorship program as an opportunity to experience heightened self-worth and personal inspiration outside their normal duties within their institutions. Sidney "A-10 Warthog" highlighted:

Sometimes you push your family aside and you make some sacrifices. You are kind of out there with the public front and you take a view. So, you want to know that all of which you've given, is going to be carried on and others are going to make it even better....The call of my heart is to invest in leaders...I care about the work...I wanted them to always be as successful as possible, because at the end of the day, for me, the mission essences students in the transformation...So it always feels good when you think you can help somebody right now....I always feel like I walk away just so excited about where they are in their journey. It fills me up—it fills my bucket.

Reilly "B-52 Stratofortress" also echoed the thoughts of the previous president in that the mentorship experience was also rewarding.

I've had the opportunity to work with good people who have been good mentors to me throughout my life. If something that I've learned along the way through a lot of varied experiences can shed a little light on something for students in the graduate program just to help them find their path, then for me, that is really rewarding. A real rewarding thing to be a part of.

Reilly "B-52 Stratofortress" also used similar descriptions on how rewarding the experience was at a personal level.

It made me feel like I was making a contribution. Maybe much what I shared would be put into action within the various colleges in which these students were working. It made me feel good. It was a very rewarding feeling to know that the students had come in and they'd go through the program at NC State and augmented by what I had to contribute.

Robin "C-130 Hercules" described the mentorship experience as meaningful and having a value of worth. The president strives to abide their community college mission to help students succeed and fulfill their religious obligations.

It means that what I'm doing is meaningful. It helps to build my own self-awareness, my own self-worth to be able to see that something that I have said or done has really led to a positive outcome for another individual. So that's what we're in business for is to help others. Everyone sees that I have helped. That is definitely beneficial to me and my spirit.

Giving Back to the Community

All the themes that resulted within this research study revolved around the leaders the community college presidents strive to be, but more importantly, centered around their general desire to give back to the community. The community college presidents are selfless in their dedication to higher education to create change and their desire to create meaningful change is

influenced by advising and training future leaders. They personally wanted to feel their efforts transformed student lives by the investments and friendship made from program participation. The presidents strive to lead by example so that the mentees and those they lead at their institutions know that their actions and their words align with being an example of what positive impact leadership can have on a community. Reilly “B-52 Stratofortress” stated, “part of that transformational leadership piece of me said, ‘what can I do now when I’m here? How can I have some impact on the future of community colleges through others?’”

Similarly, Robin “C-130 Hercules” stated, “It’s all about time to change, to promote change in our community and then change the individual lives of our residents.” The presidents did not highlight how they were looking to advance their career or make more money, but how they could make their community better. Specifically, Finley “C-17 Globemaster” described how they sacrificed their personal time to further the agenda of giving back to the community.

Finley “C-17 Globemaster” summarized the following:

Jerry, there’s not a month that goes by that I’m not talking to some [graduate] student outside of my core hours. Sometimes people reach out to me on LinkedIn and say, ‘you know, I’ve been stuck at vice president. I’ve got my doctorate. Can I just pick your brain? Can I just talk to you for 30 minutes?’ You know that that happens to me all the time... We do this work as part of our contribution to help make our community, our state, our country better.

The point made by the president Finley “C-17 Globemaster” is that they invest time to do mentorships, not just in the executive-level mentorship program. They articulated in the interview it is part of their job, social, and community responsibility, but it also is their core responsibility based on their religious and personal beliefs. Other presidents used words to

describe the selfless acts they perform and had the opportunity to experience in the mentorship program as “inspirations,” “makes me feel good,” or “I felt I learned something.” Robin “C-130 Hercules” said that they would advise other college presidents to participate in the executive-level mentorship program or another mentorship.

It’s well worth it. Well worth the investment, and I would also advise them to think about the future of our colleges. This would be a way for them to have some input beyond what they may have in their regular day-to-day work. To have an input in the future for colleges and not just the future of colleges but also how they operate now.

One president had a unique perspective in that the community college system changed their life. They could choose to work in a different field, but they choose to remain in the community college arena because of the impact they have on student outcomes. It was of the reasons they felt this was an amazing opportunity to give back while partnering with a graduate program to improve the outcomes of the participating students. Toni “Air Force One” went on to say:

If it weren’t for the community college, I really don’t know how my life would have turned out. So, my goal was to try to become a leader of an organization to allow me to help shape and help the organization be as impactful to as many students like the community college was for me.... It truly was a purposeful decision for me to stay in the community college world but one that hopefully allows me to help people change their lives. I have been very fortunate in that I’ve been able to have a few key people all along the way who were willing to give me input and to give me guidance along my journey. So, when the opportunity came up through the partnership with [a university] to be a mentor, that meant a lot to me. I told them I’d be happy to help anybody who’s wanting

to grow within the community college...because if it weren't for people who had helped me and been available to answer my questions, I certainly would not be where I am today.... This is a way I can show my appreciation to those people that helped me. I try to make myself available to help others.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the research findings were presented from this study regarding the experiences of community college presidents. There were seven semistructured interviews completed with community college presidents via phone due to the limitations of COVID-19 pandemic and the direction of university IRB recommending no in-person meetings. Data analysis was completed using an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach (Smith et al., 2009). Within the analysis and evaluation of the phenomena, seven themes emerged relating to the experience of the community college presidents. The themes highlighted in Table 2 were as follows: Positive Organizational Impact, Leadership Style, Transforming Student Lives, Obligation to Train Future Leaders, Spiritual Fulfillment, Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment, and Giving Back to the Community.

The researcher utilized semistructured interviews to answer the research question:

What are the experiences of community college presidents based on participation in an executive-level mentorship program?

Positive Organizational Impact

The first theme, Positive Organizational Impact, centered around their experience and ability to bring about positive change in the presidents' organizations. The mentorship experience provided an opportunity to implement new best practices based upon what they learned while mentoring. The presidents also learned from their mentorship experience to be

thoughtful of their own actions while mentoring within their institution and leading by example to demonstrate how their staff can lead from where they are.

Leadership Style

The aspect of leading from where you are provided context for the importance of the second theme, Leadership Style. The presidents all had different nuances to their leadership goals and approaches; however, they all focused on being inclusive leaders. They understood that to be a transformational leader they needed to incorporate feedback, be transparent, honest, and engaged to not only be good leaders within their institutions but to gain trust from the mentors to move beyond a transactional relationship with their mentees. They experienced a connection in being able to share ideas with their mentees and home in on what the mentees wanted to get out of the mentorship experience. The connection with the mentees was important based on their dedication to the mission of improving the lives of community college students. In this scenario, it was the graduate students who wish to lead within the community college system.

Transforming Student Lives

In the third theme, it was clear the presidents are willingly and intentionally striving to Transform Student Lives through the mentoring process and help them avoid some of the missteps the presidents faced in their journey to ascending to their presidency. The president understood that influencing the mentees can have a lifelong impact to the students not only from a potential financial impact but also the knowledge obtained by those students that will enable them to give back to the community college system as potential senior leaders. The presidents fully understood that the presidency is not a permanent role and that they will eventually retire. Mentoring is a direct way of transforming students' lives by exposing them to senior leadership

level meetings gaining insight into the community college arena to broaden the students' perspective and thought mindset enabling them to become better thought leaders.

Obligation to Train Future Leaders

The presidents felt there was an obligation for them to train future leaders to understand their journey. Multiple presidents indicated they did not get to where they are today alone. They strongly suggested that they had help along the way by people offering advice, resources, and, in some cases, just simple encouragement at the right time to keep them moving forward in their path. Their prior experience and knowledge that multiple community college presidents across the country and state are eligible to retire influenced them to train future leaders to ensure they created a pipeline of talented people to take on these roles now and in the future. The presidents felt the mentorship program was an intentional way to create change and prepare the graduate students by transferring their knowledge and experiences to the mentees.

Spiritual Fulfillment

One area the researcher did not consider within the research literature was the fifth theme around Spiritual Fulfillment. Multiple presidents emphasized the seed principle of reap what you sow. They explained they needed to invest time into future leaders to build an adequate and diverse pipeline of people to take their place. Carnation et al. (2019) argued modeling faith provides mutual benefits for people and their mentors, while also contributing to spiritual health. The idea that mentoring would provide a spiritual benefit was not something the researcher had initially considered when they began this dissertation research. Siberine and Kimball (2019) stated what the presidents conveyed:

Sometimes in our eagerness to provide young people all the right knowledge, we obscure the reality that faith is not just what you think but how you live, and the best way to learn

how to live is by the example of others in the context of a community living a distinctive way of life. (p. 39)

The presidents need to teach the mentees not only the knowledge of how to lead, but they also must be good stewards in showing them how to be a good leader by how they lead and conduct their lives. In essence, leading by example. One president stated this was their form of tithing. This was their spiritual duty to help, which reinforces their faith, principles, and values.

Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment

The sixth theme, Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment, highlighted the presidents are lifelong learners. They continued to want to grow in their careers by interacting and learning from others. The presidents also felt a sense of fulfillment in being needed and the feeling of gratification of seeing their mentees grow within the program and while building strong relationships with their mentees. One president described the interaction as relational, which goes beyond a purely transactional relationship. In this dyadic relationship, the president learned tools and techniques to make their institution better, but more importantly, they were able to share their experiences and tacit knowledge so mentees would be able to make better decisions as a leader.

Giving Back to the Community

The last theme, Giving Back to the Community, tied back to the mission all the presidents strive to achieve. Frankie “WC-135 Phoenix” quoted Dallas Herring: “we must take the people where they are and take them as far as they can go.” Frankie emphasized that helping people better their lives will have a positive impact on the community. The presidents understood that helping the mentees is a way to ensure there is adequate leadership in the pipeline with the right knowledge and the right mindset to the future in whatever leadership role

the graduate students ascend to today or long after the community college presidents have retired.

The presidents who served as mentors perceived positive impacts to their organization's performance and individual professional development. The process of mentoring in this program provided presidents an intentional platform to develop future leaders that will transform the lives of students. Presidents are using this as a form of professional development and succession planning. The leaders are concerned with the development of community college leaders overall, rather than just the development of future leaders at their own institution. This provides the presidents with a chance to give back from their educational experiences and fulfill their obligations as leaders to ensure others will be prepared to take their roles.

Convergence and Divergence

In this interpretive phenomenological analysis, the college presidents experience mentorship from different lenses. From a divergent perspective some college presidents felt the experience aligned with their religious and spiritual values. Their ability to meet in person, prior to the pandemic, and online allowed them a personal connection with their mentees and they felt that helping the doctoral students in the mentorship helped fulfill obligation to help their community sowing seeds to grow they felt this was a form of tithing. Not all individuals in the mentorship had this level of spiritual enlightenment. The area in which the presidents experience converged was in the ability to meet with their mentees in order to facilitate learning via leader-member exchange within their mentor-mentee micro groups. The presidents felt the experience of having the mentees interact with their staff members gave the students an opportunity for professional development. However, presidents felt the mentorship experience personally allowed them the opportunity for professional development learning best practices from their

mentees. The executive-level mentorship environment allowed an open, collaborative environment and the presidents recommended that other presidents participate in the program for their own benefit and also what they can offer to the doctoral students.

Composite Descriptions (Essence of the Experience)

The composite description is an integration of the individual descriptions into a group description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This description provides the essence of what the community college presidents experienced as a homogeneous group. Creswell (2013) advised researchers to “write a composite description” and argued that “This passage is the “essence” of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study” (p. 194).

The executive-level mentorship experience positively impacted the lives of the community college presidents because they got to experience the opportunity to pass along the tacit knowledge that they have honed over their careers. The community college presidents felt a sense of accomplishment knowing the lessons their respective mentees have learned will better inform their decision making for their current and future leadership role that will have a direct impact on community college system. All of the presidents felt rewarded knowing they are giving back to their communities. Although transforming student lives is in the community college charter and expectation of the presidents’ role, the presidents felt an obligation to help students even on their own personal time because the presidents all explained they did not get to where they are today without someone else giving them a helping hand or just basic encouragement. They all expressed that based on the collaborative nature of the executive-level mentorship program and the growth they have seen in themselves and their mentees, they would not only continue to participate, but also recommend that other presidents in the system consider

the opportunity to participate in the program for the benefit of the students, their respective community college, and for themselves.

This chapter concluded by summarizing the themes highlighted in Table 2 were as follows: Positive Organizational Impact, Leadership Style, Transforming Student Lives, Obligation to Train Future Leaders, Spiritual Fulfillment, Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment, and Giving Back to the Community. In chapter five, the researcher concludes with a summary of the study along with suggested implications for practice, implications for policy, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The researcher in this phenomenological study summarized the findings of the experiences of community college presidents participating in a mentorship program and provided implications for practice and policy. Future research opportunities and an overall conclusion is also summarized. The researcher discussed how the themes identified in chapter four connected with literature and the theoretical framework lens utilized in this study. The researcher completed the research study by discussing potential improvements in the mentorship program/practice based on feedback from the community college presidents.

Review of Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to answer a singular question:

What are the experiences of community college presidents based on participation in an executive-level mentorship program?

This research study centered around the shared experiences of seven community college presidents who volunteered to participate in semistructured interviews to elaborate on their individual experiences on being a mentor in an executive-level mentorship program. The researcher chose to interview each president separately to better understand their individual experience versus utilizing a focus group to ensure their thoughts and experiences were unaltered by group think or domination of any single president. An interpretive phenomenological analysis approach was the best fit to study and analyze the experiences (Alase, 2017). The researcher bracketed their personal experiences and background with the phenomenon to ensure there were no perceived or inherent biases in the culmination of this research study (Moustakas, 1994).

The interview responses provided were audio recorded and transcribed. The researcher did first level line by line coding using the Word versions of the transcripts. Once the first level

coding was completed, the transcripts were loaded into NVivo 12 to complete a second level of coding. The software made it easier to group those responses from the line-by-line transcription and complete a second level coding to deduce the themes that emerged throughout the process. The themes that emerged reflected the shared experiences of the community college presidents from their individual interviews. The resulting themes, along with contextual descriptions and summary, is described as the “essence of experience” (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). A summary of the findings described previously in chapter four is described in the next section.

Summary of Findings

The community college presidents who volunteered to participate in the research study represented all regions within North Carolina community college areas. Invitations were sent out to multiple community college presidents who had participated in the same mentorship program. A total of eight responded with a willingness to participate; however, only seven were able to commit to participation in the 45-60 minute semistructured interviews. Leader-member exchange theory was used to better understand the president’s shared experience while participating in the program. By analyzing the semistructured interviews, the seven themes that emerged answered the research question illuminating the shared experiences of community college presidents participating in a mentorship program. The specific themes are described as follows: Positive Organizational Impact, Leadership Style, Transforming Student Lives, Obligation to Train Future Leaders, Spiritual Fulfillment, Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment, and Giving Back to the Community. The next sections discuss how the themes were supported by the review of the literature and the leader-member exchange theoretical framework.

Connecting Themes to Previous Literature

Based on the results articulated in chapter four, it was apparent that the community college presidents had multiple shared experiences in their desire to model Dallas Herring's perspective. Frankie "WC-135 Phoenix" stated, "We need to take people where they are and take them as far as they can go," referencing the late Dr. Dallas Herring, who is known as the father of the North Carolina Community College System (Central Carolina Community College, 2013). It is clear that their personal focus was to address the concern of cultivation of leadership in others. Ghosh et al. (2020, p. 328) noticed in participants who engage in mentoring partnership reflected more relational features "taking a holistic perspective, personal learning and growth, and shared influence" for both mentor and mentee. Hence, the experiences captured by the presidents are in line with other recent research in understanding the relational aspect and benefits of mentoring and work around leader-member exchange. Leaders-member exchange is:

- (a) a system of components and their relationships (b) involving both members of a dyad
 - (c) involving interdependent patterns of behavior and (d) sharing mutual outcome instrumentalities and (e) producing conceptions of environments, cause maps, and value.
- (Scandura et al., 1986, p. 580)

The rich exchange of information in a dyadic relationship made the mentoring program a relational experience versus the interaction being transaction with a top down only approach where community college presidents would have only shared information downward to the mentees in an autocratic scenario. Scandura et al. (1986) describe that relationship and authoritarian and not as effect as the dyadic relationship in which the mentees and the community college presidents experienced.

The themes of Positive Organizational Impact and Leadership Style and the following literature supported the mission and goals of the community college presidents in their desire to positively impact their institutions while demonstrating the leadership qualities that foster trust not only their graduate mentees but the mentees they support. Power (2013) and (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1996) emphasized leader-member exchange and transformational leadership as enablers for the presidents to have a positive experience for them and their mentees. The theory of leader member exchange and transformational leadership theory explained in chapter two aligned with the qualities that the presidents implored in their leadership styles. The positive organizational impact and leadership style themes centered on leadership for the greater good of the community but also how community college presidents positively affected how mentees become transformational learners (Mezirow, 2000) based on the positive aspects of leadership style the presidents portrayed. Enabling the mentees and having a relational mentorship experience between the community college president and mentees addressed the presidents' concern of cultivating leadership in others.

The themes Transforming Student Lives, Obligation to Train Future Leaders, and Giving Back to the Community homed in on the experiences of wanting to transform the lives of students. The action of training future leaders was an additional way to give back to the community now and in the future. Within the review of the literature, a significant aspect of training (Bardia, 2010; Cekada, 2012; Gagnon & Smith, 2013) emphasized the need for knowledge sharing through mentoring in the traditional leader member and the benefits of reverse mentoring to foster a reciprocal relationship (Carmeli et al., 2010; Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012).

The remaining themes of Spiritual Fulfillment and Personal Growth and Sense of Fulfillment emphasized the experiences internalizing self where the other themes were more outwardly focused. In the perception of self, there are beliefs that guide behavior. When doing an introspective look, the community college presidents articulated their experience of helping others whether directly with students, community colleges, or within the community. The presidents felt a sense of reward and self-worth. The literature highlighted a new multigenerational workforce along with the need to keep the Baby Boomer population engaged and millennials committed (Deal et al., 2010). The community college presidents all agreed that participating in an executive-level mentorship program furthered the professional development and inspired them in feeling they made a difference. The presidents' and graduate mentees increased their human capital which has benefits for the individual and their respective organizations (Ali & Chaundry, 2016; Schultz, 1971). Schulz (1971) postulated the presidents' feeling of self-worth and feeling that they made a difference aligned with his first major category of human activity that stated improved human capabilities can be health facilities and services. If feeling good helps the presidents feel less stressed and results in greater stamina, vigor, and vitality, then this has increased the presidents' human capital. The aspect of spiritual fulfillment allowed some of the presidents to increase their human capital by aligning with their spiritual value and religious obligations. Nolan-Arañez (2020) articulated how spirituality is a meaning-making paradigm where the spiritual aspect is integrated in how people live their life. Being able to satisfy their spirituality in what they do in their day-to-day life gives people a sense of life purpose. Lifelong learning and giving back to the community were perceived as a positive experience for all the college presidents when analyzing their shared experiences.

There were some indirect negative aspects of the mentoring experience to both mentees and mentors given the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic that occurred during this research study. One community college president felt that some students who were introverts may not have had an equal opportunity to exert themselves within the Zoom calls because some extroverts may have unknowingly dominated the calls at times. Zoom calls did not allow for the same level of face-to-face personal interactions; hence the experiences were not as rich from the perspective of being able to bond over lunch or dinner. Additionally, all the presidents felt their current mentees missed out on key experiences, such as attending board-level meetings. These meetings would have provided their mentees a deeper level of understanding on how policy is decided and implemented along with the tradeoffs associated with those decisions. The mentees were not able to fully immerse themselves into the in-person experience. One benefit; however, was that technology allowed for presidents and mentees to meet virtually with less scheduling conflicts because the presidents and the mentees did not have to travel to see each other. Despite the potential of an unsuccessful mentoring match and an unforeseen pandemic, the overall experiences described by the college presidents was very positive based on their overall responses, their willingness to mentor again, and their recommendation that other community college presidents participate in similar, intentional programs.

Connecting Findings to Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Leaders and members can cultivate relationships in a workplace, non-profit, or volunteer organizations making it equally beneficial for leaders and member to join in a dyadic relationship (Bagg, 2017). In this study, the primary relationship was the community college president partnering with the doctoral student in which they volunteered to mentor as seen in Figure 4. Northouse (2016) suggested the dyadic relationship is the central point of the leader-member

exchange. The findings in chapter four are supported by this theory in that college president expressed that the experience was rewarding not only for them but also for their institutions. The doctoral students (mentees) gained new perspectives along with having an experienced mentor to shadow and learn new perspective outside of their current purview.

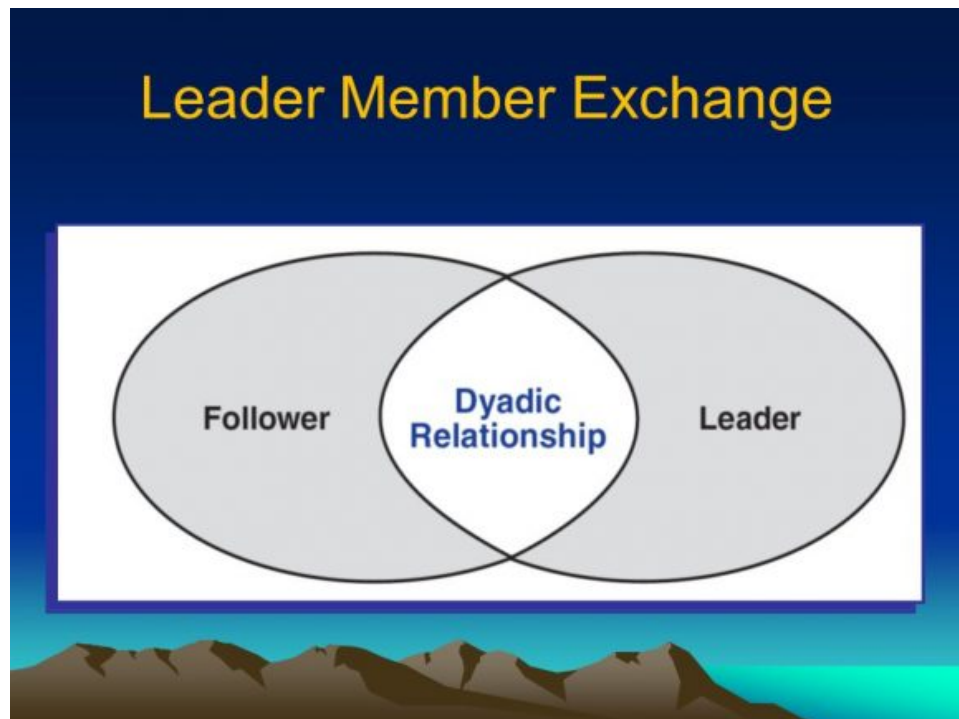


Figure 4. *Dyadic Relationship*

Source: <https://sites.psu.edu/leadership/files/2017/10/1-1y76msu.jpg>

Bagg (2017) also suggested the leader-member exchange places the focus on leaders and their mentees but is a lens into how relationship develop between the leaders and the collective mentees as referenced in Figure 4. Sidney and Charlie both expressed in their interview that they helped facilitate conversation so that the mentees collaborated with each other to solve work problems. They both felt the mentees learned as much from interacting with each other as they learned from each of the presidents. The presidents changed the dynamics of where mentees would come to them with a problem and look for an immediate solution; to mentees assessing

their problem and then coming to the president with potential solutions and asking for advice regarding the pros and cons based on their lived experiences as seen in Figure 5. Their mentees also started collaborating with each other sharing best practices within their respective organizations. Northouse (2016) stated “leaders can create collaborative partnerships within an organization which can benefit the organization’s goals and leaders own career progress (p. 142)”.

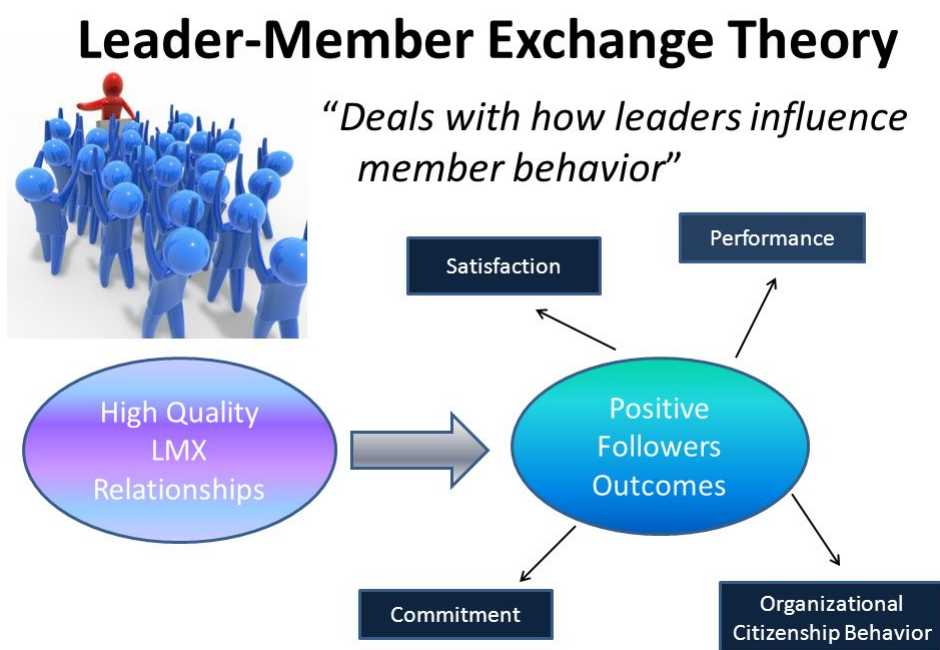


Figure 5. *High-Quality Relationship Impact*

Source: <https://sites.psu.edu/leadership/files/2017/10/2-2gc6fsg.jpg>

In this case of the mentorship program, the mini organization was the president and their mentees. The mentees formed a high-quality relationship initially led by the president but the relationship very quickly began providing benefits for not only the mentees, but also the presidents. The positive relationship of the president seen in the findings of chapter four created positive outcomes for all involved leading to satisfaction, commitment to their mini team, and a positive behavior.

Implications for Practice

The results in this study indicated there are implications for practice that can be done within the scope of mentorship, specifically within the community college system. There are three items that could be done to enhance learning for future leaders and allow community college presidents an opportunity to cultivate leadership in others.

Executive-Level Mentorship Program Implementation

People showed satisfaction and personal fulfillment if mentors had mentored before versus those who have not (Parise & Forret, 2008; Ragins & Scandura, 1999). This suggests community college presidents and other institutional leaders could get personal fulfillment by being mentors over time. Frankie “WC-135 Phoenix” stated they felt mentoring was important and that they had been mentors before. This would indicate that they were aware of the potential time commitment. They were benefiting the graduate students and felt satisfied by serving as a mentor again (Parise & Forret, 2008; Ragins & Scandura, 1999). Multiple community college presidents indicated they felt that the experience was rewarding. An additional president used a metaphor stating the mentorship experience filled their bucket. It is recommended to have a greater impact beyond the seven community college presidents that participated in this study; an intentional executive-level mentorship program would need to be implemented at the Board of Trustees level.

Matching Community College President with Aspiring Leaders

Presidents saw the mentorship program experience as an opportunity to help themselves and help others in the process. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1996) suggested that leader-member exchange yields positive results for both parties involved. This strongly supports the idea of increasing human capital (Galiakberova, 2019). Additionally, Parise and Forret (2008) suggested

by developing others through mentorship, you increase your own development and personal satisfaction. The intangible benefits outweigh the risks for leaders to mentor. It is recommended that community college presidents participate in mentorships based on this study for the benefit for the mentor and the mentee. Charlie “B-2 Spirit” and Finley “C-17 Globemaster” both agreed that mentorships are great opportunities for both mentor and mentees when both are invested in the relationship beyond being purely transactional. The key aspect in the executive-level mentorship program as described by multiple presidents was the matching process. The presidents felt the Aspen survey, administered by the program coordinator, that paired mentees with a particular weakness and area of interest with a president that had those values and strengths was one of the key reasons the program was successful. Additionally, presidents also articulated having specific targets and desired tasks to complete was a good baseline for them to follow. They could add their own enhanced experience and learning aspects that they wanted to accomplish, allowed for a positive experience for the mentee and the presidents. Hence, if there is a program that is implemented, the likelihood for success may hinge on the investment of time and resources to facilitate a good matching process along with on-going support from a program coordinator.

Encourage Participation

Leaders within institutions have an opportunity to lead by mentoring. Participating in an intentional mentoring program has an opportunity to enhance not only the presidents’ personal growth but also mentees in which they invest (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). This furthers the human capital of all involved. The community college Board of Trustees would need to be supportive and encourage individuals to participate in a mentoring program if available. Additionally, presidents also must be supportive of their employees participating in mentorship

both internally within their institutions but equally supportive of their staff seeking mentoring opportunities with other senior leaders across the community college system.

Implications for Policy

Several potential opportunities emerged from themes of this research study. Presidents were satisfied with their experience in the mentoring program. However, they felt students could have a richer experience if there was commitment from a college or policy perspective. The presidents felt having opportunities to experience Board-level meetings was beneficial for the mentee learning. Unfortunately, that may not always be supported by their colleges since it takes time away from their day jobs. Hence, a change in policy was an initial suggestion or support from immediate managers/directors. Below are potential policies that could support a formal executive mentorship program within the North Carolina community college system.

Leader Success

The Board of Trustees within community college institutions have an opportunity to encourage mentoring programs. The Board of Trustees could use the results of this study and leverage any available lessons learned from community college presidents across North Carolina to implement policies that foster leadership success similarly to the mission of community colleges to foster student success. Aspiring leaders are equivalent to students since they are looking to increase their human capital in increasing their education position, economic position, and personal satisfaction as described in by Schultz (1971). It is imperative for leader success to be an integral theme of policy for the community college system of North Carolina given the regional economies, students, faculty, and employees who depend on community colleges remaining successful (Alumuddin, 2017). If successful in driving leadership success among aspiring leaders, these individuals would be prepared to obtain higher-level leadership positions.

It also provides presidents a built-in succession pipeline. It could also allow movement of staff to obtain leadership positions in other counties within the state and across the nation; hence, building a successful leadership pipeline strengthening the community college system.

Policies for Community College Collaboration

Collaboration between community colleges within the North Carolina would have the potential to increase personal satisfaction for the leaders within the community college system. While this study did not specifically seek the benefits that occur to institutions, the presidents' mentioned that there were benefits for their community colleges. Sidney "A-10 stated that the mentees were initially concerned that Sidney may share information with their respective president, but once Sidney gained their trust there was a strong aspect of leader-member exchange. It is important to have aspiring leaders be mentors who are not their supervisor and have safe conversation without repercussions. The executive-level mentorship program in this study achieved this since mentees were paired with someone who was not their president. There needs to be a policy that presidents or senior leaders would mentor individuals not within their community college to preserve the rich, dyadic experience this study highlighted. For this type of cross-college collaboration to occur, there would need to be policies and community college incentives or it is unlikely this would be successful at scale beyond the executive-level mentorship program facilitated in this study.

Additionally, the Board of Trustees and college presidents should then use any new implemented policies to encourage other leaders at their institutions to serve as mentors. The researcher hypothesizes that given the benefits yielded through this mentoring program, there could be a similar phenomenon for other leadership levels. However, this would need to be

driven by policy to ensure mentoring was intentional and that mentoring is valued as part of the leadership job responsibility.

Financial and Time Investment

The Board of Trustees would also need to allow for leaders and mentees to have time to participate. Most of the presidents in this research study highlighted there is value in seeing interactions among board members, watching the dynamics of the meeting, and seeing the meeting preparation better understand the cause and effect of decisions being made. It would help mentees to understand the tradeoffs when leading and making decisions at the highest level. These skills are essential for potential leaders to ascend in their careers, and these skills are not easily obtained unless future leaders are given time allotted for them to learn. Finley “C-17 Globemaster” stated, “mentees need to come to board meetings and see what a real board meeting looks like [and] observe that dynamic in the room. Sidney “A-10 Warthog” also supported this position and stated: “there is a benefit in seeing senior-level administration meetings and observing the pre- and post-meetings in addition to the main meeting.” They felt this would give future leaders the time for personal reflection and an opportunity to interact and learn from senior leaders. There may also be the indirect benefit of overall job satisfaction if the mentors and mentees feel they are getting benefits from institutions investing in them for their success and personal fulfillment.

Future Research Opportunities

This dissertation research explored the impact on the community college presidents based on their shared experiences and their participation in an executive-level mentorship program. Through the data analysis process, the researcher developed ideas for future research. In this study, there was a mix of race and gender among participants; however, this occurred naturally and was not intentional. Further research addressing mentorship could be conducted to determine if

there are varying impacts based on race, age, gender, years of experience, and/or any differences due to intersectionality. This research addressed one point in time. Additional research could determine the long-term outcomes for both mentors and mentees based on participating in an executive-level mentoring program. There could be long-term benefit for the mentees if their mentors continue to guide them in their career and help them obtain senior-level positions, such as community college presidency. There could be long-term personal satisfaction aspects that keep community college presidents engaged longer in the community college system.

Another area for future research relates to whether the executive-level mentorship program is scalable to additional colleges throughout the nation. Further research could determine whether the success of the community college presidents' shared experiences was unique within the United States. Additional research could be investigated to determine if the shared experiences is duplicated within different cultures internationally given the leader-member interaction in other cultures may not allow for a true dyadic relationship.

One area not investigated in this research is whether non-educational entities, specifically government and for-profit organizations, could also benefit from the implementation of an executive-level mentoring program within their organizations. Research could be done to determine whether there is job satisfaction impact, financial impact to the organization, or significant growth in their leadership pipeline based on participation from senior leadership participating in a similar mentoring program.

Conclusion

This study explored whether participation in the executive-level mentorship program had an impact for the community college presidents who participated. During the review of current literature and analysis of the research findings, it was determined that individuals can gain personal fulfillment by mentoring. The LMX theory (Power, 2013) was proven to be a guiding

principle in which the presidents operated. The community college presidents felt an obligation to provide guidance and exchange their knowledge with not only their mentees, but also their communities. The presidents understood that their altruistic nature allowed for the fostering of a relationship in which their mentees and respective institutions benefitted. The presidents also articulated that their transformational leadership styles fostered a level of transparency and trust that enabled a dyadic relationship in which the presidents were able to achieve professional development. They increased their human capital and there was potential for their mentees to increase their human capital which aligned with Mincer's (1958) theory that individuals can increase their earning potential through education.

Three unexpected findings were uncovered in this study. The first was that some of the college presidents were able to fulfill their religious obligations through the work they did as mentors. The mentorship experiences allowed them to give back to the community and follow in the path of their religious obligations as a form of tithing. The second unexpected impact within the study was the positive and negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the presidents to interact from a socially distanced posture, which enabled a more efficient way for mentors to meet with their mentees due to reduced travel times and fewer scheduling conflicts. The negative consequence of COVID-19 was a loss in the richness of the experience that they had in previous interactions in the program. Previous cohorts met the presidents in-person and spent more personal time with them. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person interactions allowed the president and their senior staff to share perspectives and attend board-level meetings. The last unexpected finding was at least one president found it difficult to connect with their doctoral students. The students were hesitant to reach out due to the president's high profile within the community and the community college system. The

hesitation and initial lack of trust had an initial impact on the high-quality relationships for that president. The president needed to invest a significant amount of time in overcoming the trust barrier. Trust is a factor that can limit the high-quality relationship if it is not recognized and actively addressed by the mentor. Ultimately, the president was able to gain the trust of their mentees, enabling them to have a high-quality relationship and a very positive experience within the mentorship program.

It was clear the community college presidents were concerned with the development of leaders not just for their own institutions, but nationally. The participation in the executive-level mentorship program enabled the presidents to give back and ensure others will be prepared to take on their leadership roles. This study does not suggest that there is 100% certainty that the positive shared experiences derived from the community college presidents can be replicated, but the study does show that there is a greater likelihood that community college presidents, who participate in an intentional mentorship program like the one selected for this research, will have a positive impact for themselves and their mentees. This research was unique in that it specifically targeted a small group of community college presidents within North Carolina. More research is needed to fully understand whether the shared experiences based on participation in an executive-level mentoring program is a phenomenon that would be consistent in a larger pool of community college presidents or implemented outside the educational arena.

CHAPTER 6: SERVING AS A MENTOR: EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

This chapter is being added as a research brief to summarize chapter one through chapter five of the dissertation. The purpose of this research brief is to provide the reader an overview of how mentorship impacted community college presidents and what are the potential next steps based on the findings. This research brief will be submitted to the Belk Center for publishing consideration. The references supporting this research brief are attached in the full dissertation within the references section. An interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to get to the essence of the experience of the community college presidents in order to complete the brief. The IPA approach allows the interviewees (e.g. research participants) to express themselves and their ‘lived experience’ stories the way they see fit without any distortion and/or prosecution (Alase, 2017, p. 9).

Introduction

This qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) evaluated how an executive-level mentorship program impacted community college presidents in North Carolina. Participation in the executive-level mentorship program promoted senior leader engagement to have a long-lasting contribution to the higher education leadership talent pool. The experience for the presidents was inspiring to them since it enabled them to connect with doctoral students, especially having the opportunity to guide them and potentially make their ascent to a leadership position easier. Additionally, the presidents’ experience allowed them to increase their own professional development through interaction with doctoral students learning new techniques and best practices. This research is important because the program showed that mentorship positively

impacted the president mentors, thereby creating an experience where there was an exchange of knowledge between mentor and mentees.

Key Points

- Presidents indicated that participation in the executive-level mentorship program yielded indirect impacts to their community college organizations based on their interactions with their mentees.
- The presidents felt an obligation to train future leaders to improve doctoral student leadership success from where they are to where they could be.
- Presidents perceived that the mentorship experience was an opportunity to connect with doctoral students to mentor and inspire future leaders in the community college system.
- Presidents sensed that they experienced personal growth and a sense of fulfillment from participating in the executive-level mentorship program with the doctoral students.
- Community college presidents were reflective about fulfilling their spiritual obligations through the mentoring opportunity with the doctoral students within the program. Some of the community college presidents describe this as a form of tithing.

The Project

Within the community college space, presidents have learned to manage across the generational divide sharing knowledge with doctoral students within the executive-level mentorship program. Osborne (2020) highlighted that since 2015, 39 of the 58 community colleges in North Carolina had experienced some level of turnover, and at the time of

publication, there were four active presidential searches. Osborne (2020) indicated that the four searches were active even during the current pandemic. Hence, there is a need to train the next generation of leaders to take on these roles, given there continues to be turnover in the presidential leadership space.

This dissertation evaluated one of the top five challenges identified by college presidents in an American Council on Education (2017) poll where 27% of presidents indicated difficulty cultivating leadership in others. Within college and universities across the United States, the average age of a college president is 61 (Seltzer, 2017), with community college presidents having an average tenure of six years (Gluckman, 2017). One research-intensive university with a land-grant mission implemented an executive-level mentorship program allowing space for community college presidents to devote their own time, resources, and wisdom in service to graduate students pursuing an education doctorate. More specifically, this dissertation sought to understand the experiences of community college presidents who participated within the executive-level mentorship program. According to Chun et al. (2012), “literature on formal mentoring has at least two critical research gaps: less attention has been paid to mentors’ and mutual benefits for both mentors and protégés than protégé outcomes” (p. 1072). This study researched the mentor experiences gap to understand what experiences they have had during the mentorship program and identify their perceived benefits and impacts.

The researcher gathered data during the summer of 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic from seven community college presidents representing the four community college regions within North Carolina. The data were obtained through semistructured interviews, which lasted 60 minutes in duration. The demographics of the presidents were masked to protect their identities and their community college institutions. Using pseudonyms allowed the presidents to

speak honestly. It minimized the possibility of their responses being tracked back to them based on their personally identifiable information like gender, age, family information, and ethnicity.

The data from the semistructured interviews were coded and analyzed for the resulting themes. The interview quotes from the community college president are highlighted to illustrate the findings within the research.

A key theme from the interviews was that the presidents experienced indirect impact to the organizations that they lead. Sidney stated:

I think it's good for the institution and that it's a feather in the cap of the community college that the president is mentoring [graduate] students.... It says something positive about our institution that [the university] is asking for me to serve as a mentor to their graduate students, so just that by itself was a positive. It's been an environment of continual learning and hearing more of what the latest research is...what good ideas they're implementing at their respective institutions. So, there's definitely an institutional gain.

The mentee had experiences in specific implementations that the community college presidents learned would be of benefit to their own institutions. This resulted in a positive impact for the institution and in knowledge gained by the community college president. Reilly stated, **"I learned about how they were doing some things at their campuses and their colleges. And I said, well, I could try that here. You know, it could be beneficial here. Not only that, some of what they [the mentees] were studying in."** Community colleges indirectly benefited from their staff [college presidents] engaging in leadership and development opportunities associated with the mentorship program.

The presidents described that they support the mission of community colleges in North Carolina which is to “improve the lives and well-being of individuals.” They aimed to maximize student success by transforming student lives. Reilly articulated, **“Sometimes just a helping hand and meeting the mentees where they are. Sometimes they just need a helping hand to get through, and to get into the door...Access is a huge part of success! To look in terms of the future and how I can help people see the bigger picture.”** Robin explained one of the best ways to transform the mentees lives and fully leverage the mentorship opportunity is to allow them to **“get an opportunity to mentally experience it and make adjustments prior to having to experience it themselves. Hopefully, again, making higher-level and better types of decision making because they’ve gotten more input from another perspective other than their own.”** The president realized that mentoring the doctoral student they could help them avoid some of the mistakes they have made in their careers in their ascent to the presidency role.

Community college presidents were also introspective in realizing that they did not get to where they are without help and guidance. They articulated an obligation to mentor future leaders. Charlie shared, **“...My goal is to grow [doctoral students] to be the next generation of tremendous leaders for community colleges across our country.”** Finley indicated, **“...there’s a real dearth of women in the pipeline to become college presidents. I want people with certain kinds of thinking to start emerging into those presidential leadership positions...I thought this was a great opportunity for me to implement that.”** Toni indicated, **“I hope there is something that I say that will inspire the next generation of future leaders to be thoughtful in their leadership. I also hope to serve as an encouragement to them (mentees).”** Toni had a unique perspective in that they devote their time to the mentorship program because the community college system changed their life. Toni

stated, **“It truly was a purposeful decision for me to stay in the community college world but one that hopefully allows me to help people change their lives. I have been very fortunate in that I’ve been able to have a few key people all along the way who were willing to give me input and to give me guidance along my journey.”** The community college presidents were humble in having the opportunity to serve as presidents and want to provide mentorship to others that they received earlier in their careers.

There was a sense personal growth and a sense of fulfillment. Robin described the mentorship experience as meaningful and having a value of worth. **“...It means that what I’m doing is meaningful. It helps to build my own self-awareness, my own self-worth to be able to see that something that I have said or done has really led to a positive outcome for another individual...”** Reilly also used similar descriptions on how rewarding the experience was at a personal level. They remarked, **“It made me feel like I was making a contribution. Maybe what I shared would be put into action within the various colleges in which these students were working...”** Industry relevance is being brought into the classroom and students are developing multiple skills demanded by employers (e.g. community colleges).

Lastly, one unexpected finding was uncovered in this study in that some of the college presidents were able to fulfill their religious obligations through the work they did as mentors. Finley shared: **“...we do this work as part of our tithe. We do this work as part of our contribution to help make our community, our state, our country better.”** The mentorship experiences allowed presidents to give back to the community and follow in the path of their religious obligations as a form of tithing.

For Decision Makers: Impact on Policy and Practice

Decision makers who are interested in promoting future leadership success and inspire their current senior leaders should consider promoting mentorship participation through the following actions:

- Leverage the executive-level mentorship program implemented by one research-intensive university with a land-grant mission and establish additional intentional programs within North Carolina. Multiple community college presidents indicated they felt that the mentorship experience was rewarding. An intentional executive level mentorship program could be implemented in the community college system by the Board of Trustees level to impact other presidents.
- Find ways for The Board of Trustees to allow for leaders and mentees to have time to participate in the mentorship experiences. It may help mentees to understand the tradeoffs that need to be considered when leading and making decisions as future leaders. The presidents indicated their mentorship guidance can help future leaders learn from the mistakes they made during their ascent to their presidency roles.
- Explore ways to encourage mentorship participation by community college presidents. While this study did not specifically seek the benefits that occur to institutions, the presidents' mentioned that there were benefits for their community colleges based on their mentorship participation.
- Board of Trustees could implement new policies that encourage and incentivize other community college leaders at their institutions to serve as mentors. The presidents expressed personal growth and sense of fulfillment based on their

participation in the mentorship program. Additionally, presidents also fulfilled their spiritual obligation through mentorship engagement. Policies enable college presidents to be mentors could not only benefit the president but could have an indirect positive impact to the community colleges that they lead.

Conclusion

Participation in the executive-level mentorship program had a positive impact on the community college presidents who participated. During the review of current literature and analysis of the research findings, it was determined that presidents can gain personal fulfillment by mentoring. The community college presidents felt an obligation to provide guidance and exchange their knowledge with not only their mentees, but also their communities. The presidents understood that their altruistic nature allowed for the fostering of a relationship in which their mentees and respective institutions benefitted. The presidents also articulated that their leadership styles enabled a mentor-mentee relationship in which the presidents were able to achieve professional development. While there is still more to learn about the benefits of mentoring for the mentor, the mentorship program highlighted in this study is making a difference in the lives of the participating community college presidents.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Research Method Diagram

QUAL Procedure

- Criteria for selection
- Establish Protocol

QUAL Product

- List of criteria for participant selection
- Interview protocol

QUAL Procedure

- Create Protocol
- Create Interview Protocol

QUAL Product

- Interview/Audio Recording
- Written Transcript

QUAL Procedure

- Coding Analysis
- Member Checking
- Thematic Analysis

QUAL Product

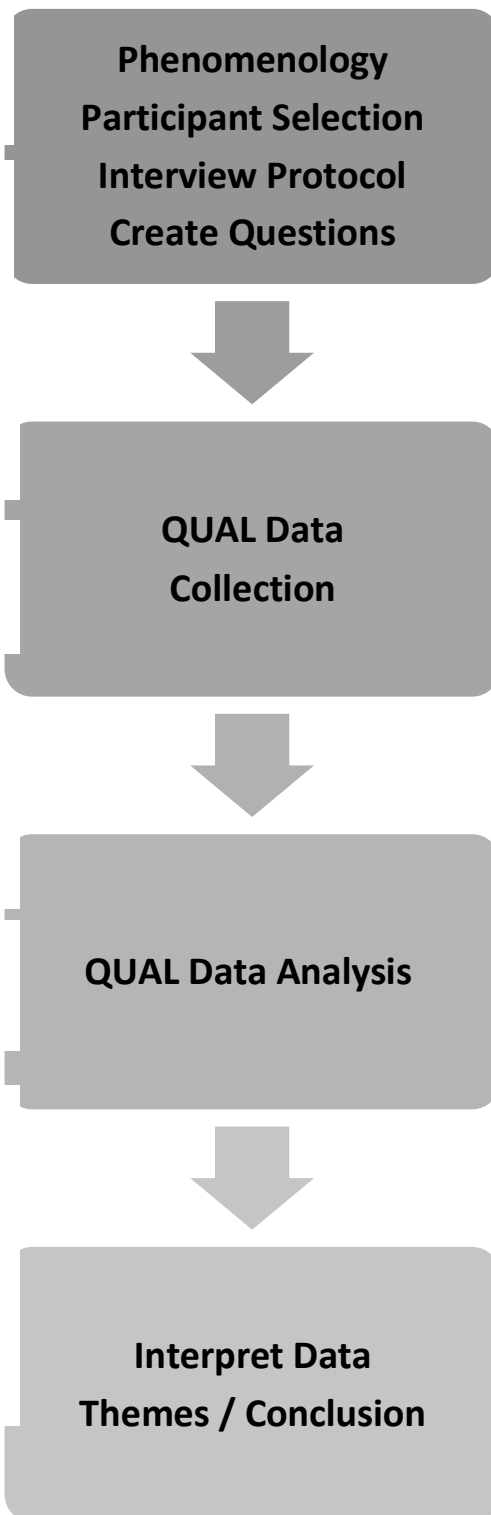
- Coded Transcripts
- Import to NVivo

QUAL Product

- Compare QUAL data

QUAL Product

- High Level Codes (NVivo)
- Summary QUAL Themes
- Convergence/Divergence of Final Conclusions



Appendix B

Interview Release Form

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Mentorship Experiences via Leader-Member Exchange: *A Phenomenology*

Principal Investigator Jerry Bryant Faculty Sponsor Dr. James Bartlett

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

You are being asked 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 or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to 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, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research is to help a graduate student expand the research field regarding mentorship and the impact on the mentor. This allows the interviewing individual to practice in the field) on the phenomena being studied, and data analysis.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey which will take approximately one hour to complete. You will be able to complete the survey from your pc using a unique link that will be provided.

Risks

No risks are expected for this research and only will enhance or improve the mentorship outcomes for students and the mentors.

Benefits

There may be direct benefit expected to the subject by knowledge that may be gained that could help mentors improve leadership effectiveness and increased multigenerational interaction.

Confidentiality

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a fire safe. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide on the survey.

Compensation

For participating in this study, you will be entered into a gift card lottery. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will become ineligible for the gift card lottery.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, principal investigator Jerry Bryant, at jwbryan3@ncsu.edu, or 919-805-0415

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 Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

Consent to Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Research Topic: Mentorship Experiences via Leader-Member Exchange: *A Phenomenology*

Opening Statement/Consent:

_____, you are invited to participate in Executive-Level Mentorship via Leader Member Exchange: A Phenomenology Research study via North Carolina State University. For this dissertation research, I will be conducting an interview to understand your experience of mentoring in a multigenerational student cohort. The dissertation advisor is Dr. James Bartlett and he will supervise this dissertation research. The purpose of this research is to help the graduate student expand the research field regarding mentorship/leadership and the impact on the student cohort and the benefit to the mentor. This allows the interviewing individual to practice in the field on the phenomena being studied, and data analysis. While there are no direct benefits to you for participating in the class study other than being entered into a gift card lotter, I hope you will enjoy this opportunity to share your experiences and stories with me. Additionally, based on the research there could be downstream recommendations or suggestion based on the results not only of the interview but also the Aspen based survey that will be conducted.

This interview is primarily for the purpose of the dissertation in which I am conducting. The information generated from our conversations will be used for academic research and possible publication. For this project, I invite you to respond to several open-ended questions in a either a phone or face to face interview of approximately 45 - 60 minutes' duration.

With your permission, I will audio record the interview so that I can transcribe key segments and interpret the data. The data resulting from your participation will be treated confidentially and used for the purposes of this dissertation proposal. Transcripts will not be released in any individually identifiable form without your prior consent, unless otherwise required by law.

No discomforts or stresses are anticipated as a result of this interview. Likewise, no risks are expected. You are free to withdraw your participation from this interview at any time should you become uncomfortable with it. Your participation in this project is voluntary. You can stop participating without giving any reason, and without penalty. You can also request to have all of the information that can be identified as yours returned to you, removed from my dissertation, or destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Jerry Bryant at (919) 805-0415, or the dissertation chair Dr. James Bartlett at (919) 208-1697. Do you have any questions regarding what I have shared thus far?

Would you be willing to provide your consent for this interview?

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Pseudonym: Interviewer:

Date:

Place:

Scheduled Time:

Start: _____ End: _____

Consider the following questions:

1. Tell me a little about your context in which you work as a President at your Community College.
 - What is the mission of the organization and what is the leadership style you observe?
2. How long have you been a Community college president?
3. How have you seen change in the students you mentored?
 - Can you specifically tell me about how you felt when mentoring the students? How does leadership affect your engagement with your mentees?
4. Do you notice an age or generational gap with the students you mentored?
 - If so, tell me what you have noticed.
 - What about personality?
5. Please share your worst experience(s) with mentoring your student cohorts?
 - Why did it NOT work well?
6. Please share your best experience(s) with mentoring your student cohorts? How did the mentorship help you? How did the mentorship positively affect your college?
7. What advice would you give to leaders that they should consider before participating in an Executive Mentoring Program?
8. What else would you like to share?

Closing the Interview

Is there anything else that we have not covered that you would like to add at this time?

- a. Personal beliefs, philosophy, commitments
- b. What you most care about, think about?
- c. Your Future goals for change in your leadership, mentoring, or engagement style

Thank you for sharing your story and participating in this interview!

Appendix D

Email Letter to Participants

Dear _____, As one of the participants in the mentorship program you have the opportunity to participate in either a face to face or phone interview to provide contextual feedback and your true experiences based on the questions you have or will answer within the interview regarding your experiences as an Executive Mentor or Mentee. The goal of the study is to be able to provide additional research in the field of the impact of mentorship on student leadership and the impact on the mentor and the mentors organization.

Jerry Bryant is a North Carolina State University Ph.D. student who will be conducting a 45-60 minute interview. Participation is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time. He will record the interview, take notes during the interview, and then transcribe the recorded interview verbatim at a later time. Any information obtained during this study, which could identify a participant will be kept confidential. The information obtained in this study may be published in journals articles or a book, dissertation, or presented at professional conference. A pseudonym will be used in the data when referring to you as the participant and also referencing your college unless you indicate otherwise. Neither your personal information nor your pseudonym will ever be provided to anyone outside of the interviewer.

Prior to the interview, you will be asked to review and sign the interview protocol and participant release form of which you will be provided a copy for your records. If you are willing to participate in this study, please send a confirmation that you accept, and you will be formally introduced to the PhD student.

Sincerely,

Jerry Bryant

Appendix E

IRB Protocol Approval

From: IRB Administrative Office <pins_notifications@ncsu.edu>
 Subject: Bartlett - 15468 - IRB Protocol assigned Exempt status
 Date: July 1, 2020 at 11:34:02 AM EDT
 To: jwbryan3@ncsu.edu
 Reply-To: ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu

Dear jerry bryant:

Date: July 1, 2020
 IRB Protocol 15468 has been assigned Exempt status
 Title: Executive Mentorship Experiences via Leader-Member Exchange: A Phenomenological Study
 PI: Bartlett, James E

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. Exempt d.2, d.4). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
2. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
3. If any unanticipated problems or adverse events occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website: <http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs/compliance/irb/submission-guidance/>.
4. Any unapproved departure from your approved IRB protocol results in non-compliance. Please find information regarding non-compliance here: http://research.ncsu.edu/sparcs-docs/irb/non-compliance_faq_sheet.pdf.

Please let us know if you have any questions.

NCSU IRB Office

Please contact ncsuirboffice@ncsu.edu if an official PDF approval letter with signature is required by your funding source.