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EXAMINING AN ADULT EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP THROUGH A POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL LENS

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EXAMINING AN ADULT EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP THROUGH
A POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL LENS

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A COMPANION DISSERTATION
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the

College of Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation

at the University of Kentucky

By

Lewis H. Burke, Jr.

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Lexington, Kentucky

2013

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

EXAMINING AN ADULT EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP THROUGH
A POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL LENS

This companion dissertation reports the findings of applied case study research on four community college organizational units that consistently meet or exceed standard performance measures. In addition, prior ample evidence confirms that performance extended significantly beyond what might be explained by available tangible resources alone. The case study contexts are common in higher education in general: a) an external partnership, (b) an ad hoc team, (c) a traditional, cross-divisional service unit, and (d) a grant-funded student service unit.

Emerging positive organizational theory and research show promise for revealing performance-influencing phenomena and behaviors that are not adequately represented in standard measures. Therefore, this collaborative case study research was designed to explore positive influences on the success of the four community college units.

This companion dissertation contains four manuscripts. Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 contains a collectively written synthesis of the findings from the four individual case studies. Chapter 3 reflects individual research on a partnership that serves as a national model for adult education. Chapter four offers an alternative perspective to developing authentic leaders in community colleges. Key findings across the units suggest the influence on performance of: (a) a people-first culture, (b) authentic, trusting, inclusive leadership, and (c) resource richness beyond constrained tangible resources. Practical recommendations for scholars and practitioners are offered.

KEYWORDS: positive organizational psychology, adult education, unit performance, organizational development, authentic leadership, institutional capacity

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  August 1, 2013
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents the late Glenda J. Burke and Lewis H. Burke, Sr. for their love, support, prayers, and encouragement. As one of the many campus kids whose "real world" was the college campus, both of you surrounded me with educators on the campus of Alcorn State University who served as mentors, cheerleaders, babysitters, coaches, and nurturers during my formative years. Although my mother died several weeks before I received my admission letter into the University of Kentucky's doctoral program, I have no doubt that she has been my guardian angel throughout this journey.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my sons Evan Lewis Burke and Kyle Alexander Burke for their patience, love, and support throughout this process. It is my hope and dream that this work will serve as a beacon to acquire as much knowledge as you can throughout your own educational journey.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation is part of a collaborative study that examines the ways in which successful units are influenced by positive organizational functioning. This dissertation is organized in a journal manuscript format. Following this introduction, the second chapter is a collaboratively written technical report that synthesizes the findings from four individual case studies of successful community college units; chapter three reflects individual research examining a successful partnership to deliver adult education services from a positive organizational lens; chapter four is a scholarly essay related to the findings in chapter three to exploring the development authentic leaders to meet community colleges and systems facing an aging of administration; and chapter five concludes the collection with reflections on the collaborative research process. References and appendices are included as appropriate at the end of each chapter.

The technical report described in Chapter 2 was developed by a four-member research team comprised of individuals who were doctoral students in a pilot cohort EdD program at the University of Kentucky as part of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). The goal of CPED is to strengthen the educational doctorate degree by making it more relevant for students who pursue the degree. My team members included Susan Berry whose individual research interest focuses on a grant funded successful student support services unit, Michael Stapleton who explores a traditional, cross divisional service unit, and Alissa Young who studies successful ad hoc team . Key findings and a synthesis of the group work can be found in Chapter 2, Dynamics of Abundance: Exceptional Performance in Four Community College Units.

My individual research focused on understanding how a successful adult education unit functions by identifying organizational factors that promote excellence when examined through a positive organizational lens. I used a partnership that has been recognized as a national model between a secondary school district and a community college as the unit of analysis and I conducted interviews of faculty, staff, and leaders at the secondary school district, community college, and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System's Office. The results of this research are reported in Chapter 3, Partnering for Excellence: Positive Leadership Approaches in a National Model for Adult Education.

The fourth manuscript in this dissertation is a chapter that explores ways to develop authentic leadership capacities within existing and potential leaders to lead units and organizations across community colleges. This reflective manuscript builds upon the findings from Chapter 3 to examine how organizations can develop leadership capacities needed to support the development of individuals within organizations. This essay can be found in Chapter 4, Developing Authentic Leaders for Community Colleges: The Need for Authentic Leadership.

Chapter 2

The Dynamics of Abundance: Exceptional Performance
in Four Community College Units

Susan T. Berry; Lewis Howard Burke, Jr.; R. Michael Stapleton; Alissa L. Young

Executive Summary

In this technical report, the authors synthesize findings from four case studies of factors that influence exceptional performance of community college organizational units. The authors show how the units achieved their successes despite resource constraints, external circumstances, and extreme internal pressures. These units demonstrate that constraints need not hinder achievement of excellence.

Community colleges are responsible to their stakeholders for multiple missions (Dougherty, 1994) as well as for meeting performance and accreditation targets. Economic pressures and significant shifts in students' expectations have created simultaneous conditions of constraint and opportunity. Traditional approaches to performance enhancement have become insufficient to meet current constraints and to adapt to shifts in stakeholder expectations. Thus, colleges must adopt new approaches and ways of thinking in order to develop the capacity to thrive in a shifting, uncertain environment (Alfred, Shults, Jaquette, & Strickland, 2009).

The cases, selected from four community colleges, represent four types of functional organization: (a) a partnership with an external entity; (b) an ad hoc team; (c) a grant-funded student service unit; and (d) a traditional service unit that crosses divisional boundaries. Data was collected from all four cases using similar methods of collection and a common interview protocol. A constant comparison method of analysis

was used within and between the individual cases to identify common and contrasting findings across the four units.

Key Findings

Analysis of findings from the units revealed numerous positive organizational dynamics that influenced exceptional performance. We assigned these dynamics to three broad themes or categories: culture, leadership, and resources. The ability of each unit to perform well depended on: (a) a people-first culture, (b) authentic, trusting, inclusive leadership, and (c) resource richness. Unit leaders and members fostered these positive dynamics by thinking differently about culture, leadership, and resources. As a unifying influence, unit members shared a compelling vision of the future from which they derived purpose, motivation, and meaning. Unit leaders and members translated these positive dynamics into actions and behaviors through informal mission statements embodied in audacious goals. We summarize these findings in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 2.1

Positive Organizational Dynamics That Influence Exceptional Unit-Level Performance

Theme	Organizational Dynamic
People-first culture	Units are characterized by a culture that values people as people.
	Unit directors and supervisors follow traditional methods of authority, but also introduce and foster a people-first mindset.
	Unit members described a sense of professional community and trust, extending in some cases to a personal, or "extended family" level.
Authentic, trusting, inclusive leadership	Leaders are found at all levels of the unit.
	Leaders articulate the formal mission in terms of audacious goals, and the resulting informal mission becomes a strong motivation among unit members.
	Unit members share a clear vision that transcends the formal mission.
	Unit members expressed a sense of higher purpose.
	The units' formal leaders and members seemed to understand these things implicitly through experience rather than deriving them from formal professional development.
Rich resources	Units demonstrated a capacity to build synergistic relationships that allow them to amplify their efforts and make more resources available to the unit.
	Unit members did not allow resource constraints to be the "ceiling" of ability to perform. Instead, they actively identified and developed their intangible resources.
	The capacity to develop all available resources served as a lever that amplified performance and attracted new resources and people.

Recommendations

We compared and contrasted these themes across the four cases to develop a

picture of organizational functioning that can be extended to other community college

units. We found unit excellence to depend on broad views of culture, leadership, and

resources that move beyond simple cause-and-effect calculations typically used in unit

evaluation and assessment. Our highly-contextual findings cannot be condensed into a

step-by-step manual for excellence. However, the following suggestions may help

community college practitioners learn to broaden views and build capacity in their own

contexts.

- Superior performance requires more than hard work—it also requires the ability to build capacity.

- Whether plentiful or not, tangible resources can charm attention away from capacity-building ways of thinking required to produce excellence.

- Intangible resources—culture, leadership, and ability to build capacity—are required to achieve aspirations of excellence.

- Patience is required because ways of thinking and perceiving can take time to change.

- People are much more than units of functional output. Valuing people as people creates supportive contexts for excellence.

Introduction

Higher education is in a people business. It is unique in that we develop longstanding relationships not only with the stakeholders who fund us, study us, or employ our students, but also with the students themselves. We spend vast resources trying to determine the best way to move students through the pipeline so they emerge educated and employable. Rarely do we study our own organizational dynamics (Bastedo, 2012). When we do, we often concentrate on our plans and deficits, and how we will find the money to meet our goals. As Caza and Caza (2008) assert, most research in organizational studies concentrates on solving problems. We report our performance to our stakeholders according to parameters they define. These measures do not effectively capture the range of organizational dynamics that affect performance (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003a).

In contrast, this research study was designed to understand the organizational dynamics of community college units that have performed with excellence that in some cases was unexpected, given the circumstances. The study offers an alternative to a prevalent view of resources that makes superior performance contingent on greater amounts of tangible resources. Consistent with emerging research into organizational and individual dynamics, this study shows that the most powerful drivers of performance are ways of thinking that build organizational capacity and allow for unexpectedly excellent performance despite constraints. To understand this, we analyzed the findings from four case studies on successful community college organizational units to learn how some of our most productive entities have achieved extraordinary levels of functioning and performance.

Our positive research perspective draws from positive psychology research (Peterson, 2006) and its extension to the workplace (Alfred et al., 2009; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003b; Luthans, 2002a; Luthans & Avolio, 2009; Luthans & Youssef, 2007). These are explained in detail in Appendix D and discussed throughout this report. We engaged this positive perspective to understand the performance of four successful community college units. Our goal was to identify influences shown in the positive organizational literature to contribute to above-average performance. Each member of this research team chose a community college organizational unit (a) that has performed well (or above average) using standard measures of performance and (b) for which significant aspects of the unit's successful performance are not adequately represented by standard measures nor easily attributed solely to levels of tangible resources.

Analysis of these four cases reveals how tapping readily-available, but often-underutilized, resources can influence overall performance and even attract additional tangible resources to a unit. It shows how these units achieved their success through the ability to amplify existing resources beyond expectations. Examples of resources in these cases include recognizing the leadership capacity of all members of a unit; the importance of sustaining a simple, shared vision that transcends the formal mission of the unit; and maintaining a positive organizational environment in which people come first.

This research builds on a study by Alfred, Shults, Jaquette, and Strickland (2009) who interviewed community college presidents to better understand and account for college performance. They found the primary determinant of excellence to be the amplification of resources through *leveraging*. That is, high-performing community colleges have the ability to identify and optimally deploy all available resources. This

ability rests on a central commitment of formal leaders to "building the strategic capabilities in staff" (p. 252) that fosters a capacity to "work differently" (p. 252).

Alfred et al. (2009) conducted their research at the institutional level through the perspective of senior leadership. Their research yielded the Community College Abundance Model (CCAM) that ranks a college's capacity to achieve abundance, as defined above. They also observed that community college leaders might be easily tempted, when confronted with a barrage of constraints and accountability requirements, to focus on growth and efficiency to meet performance goals. However, they conclude, "Working harder and faster will not get your college to abundance, but investing in people and working differently will" (p. 252).

Existing research on positive organizational functioning in community colleges stops short of explaining exceptional outcomes at the unit level or describing the dynamics that influence excellence. However, the work of community colleges is performed in organizational units collaborating within the institution and with external partners. Thus, our research emerges from an interest in investigating how the CCAM findings apply at the level of the organizational unit—where the actual work of a college takes place.

Based on their findings, Alfred et al. (2009) hold that building the capacity to amplify resources and to work differently requires community colleges, leaders, and staff to "think differently" (p. 252) about four aspects of the organization: performance, resources, the organization itself, and leadership. Our study of each of the cases selected examined the intentional capacity-building achieved in the units in each of the four aspects.

Thinking differently about performance means more than working harder or more efficiently—although those things are essential. In what ways do these community college units enhance performance beyond efficient effort?

Thinking differently about resources means recognizing intangibles as the means by which efforts can be amplified as an organization moves toward purpose-defined outcomes that exceed expectations. Intangibles include valuable traits, knowledge, and behaviors that are not easily measured (e.g., resilience that enables a student to persist and graduate in the midst of a personal crisis). In what ways do these community college units value and build upon intangible resources?

Thinking differently about the organization means living out the belief that people come first. In what ways do these community college units develop relationships, rather than interchangeable parts, and recognize the efforts of many leaders who are empowered with autonomy and support?

Thinking differently about leadership means understanding that there are many leaders in a high-performing organization. Formal and informal leaders with positive characteristics need to be present and, if not, developed and enhanced in those with the decision-making responsibility. In what ways do these community college units control personal resources—ways of thinking and being—that can be changed and developed? These resources are attributes and traits that can contribute to unit-level excellence as easily as they hinder or are merely neutral.

In addition, emerging streams of positive organizational theory and research have shown promise for focusing on what is best about organizations and individuals. These include positive organizational scholarship, positive organizational behavior, and positive

psychology. The positive research orientation presents opportunities to think differently

about organizational performance. It augments familiar approaches by expanding the

range of desirable outcomes and success indicators to include behaviors and

characteristics that foster individual and organizational flourishing (Cameron et al.,

2003a; Caza & Caza, 2008) as well as psychological capacities that influence individual

and organizational outcomes.

These emerging streams of theory and research reveal new ways of thinking about

individual and organizational performance. Scholars and researchers in these areas

deliberately adopt a positive framework for understanding success in organizations.

Through a focus on phenomena and behaviors that promote flourishing and vitality in the

workplace, researchers have begun to discover correspondence between positive

organizational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003b), positive organizational behavior

(Luthans, 2002a, 2002b), positive psychology (Peterson, 2006; Seligman &

Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005;

Watkins & Mohr, 2001).

Thus, in exploring the exemplary performance of the units described here, we applied the
concepts of positive organizational theory to create a lens through which to investigate
successful organizational functioning. In this research report, we consider three areas of
focus in the positive literature: positive leadership, perspectives on resource development
that build organizational capacity through resource amplification, and the presence or
enhancement of psychological capital. Collectively, these are shown to promote
phenomena and conditions that (a) enable individuals to be at their best (Cameron et al.,
2003a; Peterson, 2006), (b) buffer the effects of trauma and uncertainty (Cameron &
Caza, 2004; Weick, 2003), and (c) create workplaces in which people are valued as
people and all available resources are maximized (Alfred et al., 2009).

Background of the Study

During our coursework and within our professional roles, our research team was

aware of one such positive framework for examining institutional performance—

appreciative inquiry (AI). During our doctoral coursework, as members of different

research teams, we conducted pilot studies using protocols informed by AI. In addition,

as employees of KCTCS, we knew that AI had been integrated to frame ongoing strategic

planning cycle discussions in positive ways. AI was also being introduced throughout the

colleges as a supportive framework for numerous, significant initiatives planned for the

coming years. Thus, when as a team of doctoral candidates we began to design the four

case studies that are the subjects of this multiple-case analysis, we decided that an

appreciative approach would be a good fit for our own positive research orientation.

A second influence was our experience of the implementation of AI across our

colleges and system-office. Four-day workshops, designed around an AI approach to

organizational development (Watkins & Mohr, 2001), were held with the intent to

produce two certified AI trainers from each college. These would return to their home

colleges, train others, and apply appreciative practices college-wide. Appreciative

inquiry was thus intended to become the foundation of an organizational culture that

would sustain significant, coming organizational changes. Although the training raised

awareness of positive approaches to change, cultural changes have not trickled down as

hoped—or at least not as quickly as hoped. For the most part, colleges that did not

already have an appreciative culture have not changed much. Instead, traditional,

discrete accountability measures still seem to have the strongest influence on planning

and processes.

All participants in the trainings received Watkins and Mohr's (2001) *Appreciative*

Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination as a suggested framework for developing

the Transformation Initiatives mentioned. The authors list six freedoms or essential

conditions of AI that echo the positive organizational literature:

1. Freedom to be known as a human being rather than merely for the role performed;

2. Freedom to be heard and not ignored—to voice information, ideas, and innovations;

3. Freedom to dream in community and at all levels in the organization, creating organizations as safe places where large, diverse groups can dream together;

4. Freedom to choose to contribute—an act that liberates power and leads to commitment and a hunger for learning;

5. Freedom to act with support in a climate of positive interdependence, thus feeling safe to experiment, innovate, and learn;

6. Freedom to be positive, to have fun, and to be happy—conditions that are not often the norm.

According to Watkins and Mohr (2001), when these six AI conditions are present, they create a self-perpetuating momentum for positive change. This individual and organizational momentum bears a resemblance to the positive, self-reinforcing *spirals of flourishing* that result from organizational virtuousness (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Froman, 2010).

Research Questions

Our interest in the positive, people-focused aims of AI provided an excellent

foundation for our curiosity about the positive research orientation. In addition, our

experience of the AI trainings within our own workplaces led us to wonder about

organizational units that were already performing at very high levels—before they

received the training. To inform the research described in this chapter, we settled on a

conceptual lens similar to AI, but more broad in scope. We draw from multiple related

positive organizational literatures, described earlier, that focus on positive phenomena,

behaviors, and traits in the workplace.

Accordingly, we were interested in how positive influences in the organizational units support extraordinary success. Our research team designed each of the studies to have a positive research orientation, similar research questions, and virtually-identical protocols. As a result, we asked questions of the case study findings from a shared positive research perspective. For example, what happens when an organizational unit leader prioritizes the development of unit members' psychological capital? How are bold, shared visions of desired unit outcomes related to performance? How do unit leaders influence unit culture? To what do members of successful units attribute their success? Do members of these units value people and intangible resources above tangible resources? If so, how are these values shaped, communicated, and perpetuated? What influences do positive organizational behaviors and psychological capital have on culture and performance in the unit? How do successful units acquire the capacity to perform exceptionally? Are successful units solely dependent on tangible resources, or are other influences at work? In successful units, how are positive behaviors and traits developed and nurtured? In what ways do these affect the performance?

To frame this multiple-case analysis and to connect it to emerging research on positive workplaces, we asked the following research questions:

- What positive organizational dynamics are found in the case studies chosen for this analysis?

- How do these dynamics influence unit performance?

- What outcomes, capabilities, and characteristics do unit members value that are not typically considered as performance measures?

- How is leadership perceived and practiced in the units?

- How are resources identified, prioritized, developed, and deployed? Which resources are valued the most?

- How do perspectives toward the recognition and use of intangible resources influence performance?

- How does psychological capital, or any of its four components, contribute to the successful functioning of these units?

Methods

During our team discussions about our research design, we decided to concentrate on functional or organizational units. Several reasons informed this choice. Small organizational entities seemed a narrow enough focus to be compatible with our research timeframe. More importantly, understanding team and group functioning is important because the everyday work of community colleges is performed in these contexts. However, we found that most positive-oriented research had been conducted at either the individual or the institutional level (Donaldson & Ko, 2010). Few studies existed in the private sector, and the positive literature is virtually silent on higher education groups and teams.

In addition to timeframe and importance of group-level functioning, our decisions were influenced by contextual factors. Each member of our research team works in a community college, and personal and professional knowledge informed each member's ability to choose organizational units that have already been recognized as successful. To support the group research component of our study, we adopted a common research protocol the four individual case studies (Appendix A). Additional prompts were used to elicit information about interviewees' perceptions about positive dynamics such as vision, relationships, trust, leader expectations, and behaviors.

We chose units of different kinds, one for each researcher, judging that the differences could provide a broader data set out of which to synthesize findings across the four cases. The four units represent common organizational structures within community

colleges and in higher education generally, potentially extending the applicability of our findings beyond the boundaries of the four individual case studies and the cross-case analysis reported here. We continued to discover the full value of choosing four separate cases at the unit level as this analysis progressed.

We chose case study method for the individual research studies because it is useful for answering questions of how and why when observing a "contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control" (Yin, 2009, p. 13). A unit of analysis, or case, can be an "individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Case study theorists agree that *boundedness* is a distinguishing characteristic of a case (Merriam, 1998). Boundedness denotes a clear idea about what is included in the case and what is not. We defined the bounds of each case analyzed for this report by limiting the number of participants interviewed and by restricting the data collection period.

To increase the validity, quality, and trustworthiness of the analysis, we used accepted qualitative research methods. The data collected for the individual studies primarily included participant data supported by documents and on-site observations. In addition to multiple data sources, our team engaged multiple reviewers and member checking (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). For example, as data was gathered from the individual cases, we continuously discussed the findings to discern themes, account for unexpected findings, and consider rival explanations. The discussions continued during the development of the individual case analyses and throughout the analysis of the four cases together.

The diversity of our research team strengthened the collaborative analysis. Our varied strengths, professional experiences, life stories, roles as community college employees, and interests in our cases assured varying perspectives. The balance and insights in the conclusions reflect our diversity. In addition, our diversity and familiarity with community college functioning informed our thinking as we operationalized our findings into realistic implications and recommendations.

Tour of the Individual Case Sites

The units contributing to the case studies described below belong to four different colleges in the same 16-college state community college system. While governed by the same state and system-wide regulations, each college maintains individual accreditation and status as an independent college. The investigative team chose these community college units based on two criteria: (a) the unit performs well or above average relative to standard measures of performance and (b) the unit appears to demonstrate additional performance criteria that include positive workplace dynamics and desirable organizational outcomes consistent with this study's positive conceptual framework.

External partnership unit. The first unit studied exists as the result of a partnership between a secondary public school system and a local community college. The secondary school system has a district wide enrollment of over 100,000 students. Its post-secondary partner, a two-year public college located in the same urban community, enrolls upwards of 15,000 students per semester. The purpose of the partnership is to promote the transition of adult education students into community college by improving mathematics, reading, and writing for students whose college placement scores fall below the minimum requirements.

This unit was chosen for study because of its national recognition as a model partnership. A national report funded by the US Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education highlighted the collaborative approach of this program as a national model of practices to help improve participation and persistence in adult education (Tolbert, 2005). The authors noted, "Partnerships and leveraged resources also have helped programs expand their services and address the needs of specific populations" (Tolbert, 2005, p. 9). Alfred et al. (2009) identify external partnerships as capacity-building levers that amplify tangible resources and lead to improved performance.

Ad hoc committee. The second unit chosen for study was an accreditation preparation team located at a rural, public two-year degree granting institution that serves approximately 7,500 students. This ad hoc team, established for a specific amount of time, was tasked with preparing the institution to complete the accreditation process that includes conducting a self-study of the institution to ensure compliance with the accreditation organization's principles.

This unit was chosen because the evaluation of their accreditation report yielded zero recommendations for improving this institution. This was one of the first institutions within the state community college system to complete the reaffirmation process with no recommendations for improvement. Given the enormity and complexity of the reaffirmation process, having received no recommendations for improvement distinguishes this ad hoc team as a high-performing unit. Additional reasons for choosing this unit include the investigator's knowledge of and experience with the accreditation process having served on accreditation review teams and her acquaintance with members of the chosen unit.

College-wide service unit. The third unit chosen for study, a community college library, serves one of the larger community colleges in the state system. The service area includes six campuses and enrolls approximately 12,000 students each semester representing over 100 counties. The library chosen for study resides in the main academic building of the primary college campus. This location is in close proximity to classrooms, administrative and student services offices, and student commons. As many as 1,800 students visit the library on peak days. As a result, many faculty and administrators describe it as the largest classroom on campus.

This library was chosen because it consistently accomplishes its mission and goals related to serving students, faculty, and staff as rated by its constituent groups in annual satisfaction surveys. Library surveys and college exit surveys indicate similar high levels of satisfaction with library services across a wide range of services (Stapleton, 2013). In addition, the professional role over several years has acquainted the researcher with the personnel and the environment, observing many of the phenomena, behaviors, and traits that are the subjects of research in the positive literature.

Grant-supported student service unit. The fourth unit chosen for study is funded by a federal Student Support Services (SSS) or "TRIO" grant. It serves a mid-sized community college with a large rural service area including a military installation. The unit assists low-income, first-generation college students and students with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline during their undergraduate study. The unit provides a small number of qualifying students with services similar to those offered to the general student population, such as academic advising and tutoring. Unlike

the campus-wide services, this unit provides its student population with a single physical environment for study, socializing, and academic assistance.

This unit was selected because it has consistently ranked within the top 10% of similar programs nation-wide, enabling it to receive continuing grant funding for twelve years. Similar to national and longitudinal measures of persistence, retention, and graduation, the SSS participants in this unit are more likely to: (a) remain enrolled in higher education, (b) accrue more college credits, and (c) earn higher grade point averages when compared to similarly qualified students who do not participate in the program (Chaney, Muraskin, Calahan, & Rak, 1997). The investigator chose this unit because it met the research design requirements and because the investigator, through familiarity with the unit, identified exceptional performance not revealed by performance evaluation. In addition, the investigator understands the purposes and functions of SSS and the demands of meeting grant performance standards for continued funding eligibility.

Exploration of Four Cases

The four members of the research team communicated with each other during the collection and analysis phase of their individual case studies. As preliminary data analysis proceeded, the team members used the findings derived from the individual case studies and through conversations, reviews of each other's writings, and brainstorming sessions proceeded to shape an overarching analysis. Approaches included comparing findings and developing themes, rearranging the themes in different configurations, and finding contrasts between the unit themes and characteristics. As the analysis deepened,

members of the research team found connections that distinguish this study's findings from studies conducted on larger organizations such as entire community colleges.

We discovered that the unit level reaches into resources often invisible to or ignored by leaders at higher levels of functioning and thus can increase performance capacity in unexpected ways. The variety of units provided us some common ground across units and revealed that some practices often thought to influence success, had little bearing on our units' success and yet other practices and attitudes often identified as neutral or unimportant had a huge effect on successful performance. The diversity of units who function in community colleges and higher education institutions in general are almost limitless so providing a small snapshot of that diversity proved valuable to this study and future research.

We proposed that discussion and review of each other's findings would reduce potential negative impacts of researcher bias or assumptions. In addition, collective analysis was broadened and deepened as we—who are community college employees ourselves—shared development of findings. In addition, we considered how our current roles and areas of responsibility as community college employees might influence the analysis of the findings. We each addressed this concern by using triangulation through interviews, observations, and documents.

Findings and Discussion

Review of the case findings shows three significant areas that influence the success of these units: (a) a culture showing commitment to a unified vision that enhances each member's sense of purpose and appreciates his or her contributions, (b) leadership traits and behaviors including trust-building that enhance and build upon a

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cohesive culture, and (c) leaders who value and enhance resources including intangible resources.

Although these are major themes from our units, they are not discrete categories. In our units that function successfully, they occur in intricate combinations. For example, culture influences personnel behaviors. Concurrently, leaders and unit members influence the culture through their actions, thereby effecting constant—although mostly minute—shifts in the culture. All unit members, regardless of formal or informal leadership role, learn, think, and grow continuously, thereby affecting how they influence everyone around them. In addition, as leaders receive feedback from the effects of how they use resources, they learn that some things work better than others do in the unit. This learning suggests new ways to leverage what they have.

People-First Culture

Bolman and Deal (2003) observe that "some people argue that organizations *have* cultures; others insist that organizations *are* cultures" (p. 243). Behaviors provide clues about the essential natures of cultures. The participants in the four units spoke at length about their behaviors and perceptions. These provided the researchers with clues about the reciprocal influences of behaviors and context. The participants' actions and characteristics formed the cultures of their units, and the unit cultures influenced the participants. The members themselves are not cultures but rather *have* cultures both as culture-builders and as recipients of unit-level culture. Thus, we argue that the essential question about our units' cultures is not what they *are* but what the members *do,* or "the way we do things around here" (1982, p. 4).

Central to our findings in all four units was leadership as a leadership disposition or "organizational state and a mind-set" (Shults, 2008, p. 148) that regards people as the units' most valuable resource. This disposition results in behaviors that treat people *as people* rather than as functional units for performing job descriptions. This disposition is an intangible resource that enables behaviors and capacities that in turn become levers for resource amplification and improved performance (Alfred et al., 2009). The members' behaviors also create a feedback loop that strengthens member commitment to the units' values and reinforces positive behaviors. In consequence, the units may be described as *enabling workplaces* (Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Park, 2006).

In each unit, the members were committed to a unified vision and reported that this shared vision provided them with a sense of purpose. In addition to collective vision and individual purpose, participants described a sense of accountability. The influences of vision, purpose, and accountability interactively influenced participants' determination to achieve the vision and fulfill individual purpose.

Despite many similarities in their ability to achieve high performance, study participants in the four units described their cultures differently. This is not surprising, because a unit's culture is, among other things, an expression of its purpose and mission. Members of the adult education unit cited trust and collaboration as significant parts of their culture, whereas the accreditation team described a culture of excellence. Library personnel exhibited pride in their unit's service and professionalism, whereas student services personnel emphasized commitment to students first. In the adult education external partnership, the importance of sustaining a committed culture based on relationships and trust was particularly interesting. Working together to develop an

entirely new model of adult and college developmental education, the leaders of each "side" of the partnership created an innovative design that transformed a culture of competition into a culture of collaboration. These leaders continued their commitment through purposeful engagement and kept their personal commitments for ten years, renewing that commitment annually.

In each unit, unit members who deal directly with students emphasized the importance of relationships within the unit including a culture of care and support. For example, relationships among library staff helped them deal with sudden death of staff family members, and the grant unit's welcoming atmosphere influenced student success and employee satisfaction. This welcoming atmosphere was the result of a legacy, honored and sustained during the transition from the first unit director and passed down to the next leader, finally evolving into a legacy that she expanded to include students. As with the centerpiece of trust and purposeful engagement found in the adult education culture, the focus of autonomy and support exists among all of our units, even if not described as such.

The accreditation team and the college it represents demonstrated two cultural distinctives: (a) a culture of excellence and (b) a culture of evidence. In other words, superior performance was expected, and decisions were informed with evidence. A team member reported that the "use of gathering and monitoring data is not episodic. It is part of the culture." Another team member said, "I don't know if it was said, but the expectation was always understood in my mind that we would get no recommendations [for change]." This was an essential goal of the team's charge because no

recommendations implied no corrective action and thus represented the team's shared aims for excellence.

Like most organizational units, each unit in this study has a formal mission that is determined for them. Sometimes the mission reflects that of the college, as in the case of the reaccreditation committee and the library. The accreditation team reflects the college culture of nothing short of excellence and the library's reflects it longstanding director's influence. State statute defines the mission of the adult education unit, and federal guidelines define the grant unit's mission.

Yet each unit also developed an informal mission or set of internal guidelines that define the actual behaviors from day to day that have become an integral part of its culture. Library staff members "serve students" and "take care of each other." The grant unit personnel similarly take care of "students first and then each other" and exhort students with this directive: "If you succeed, we succeed." The adult education collaborators dedicated themselves to purposeful engagement taking an active part in meetings that chronicled the progress of the collaboration. The accreditation team strove for excellence through preparedness and developing the expertise of its members.

Each unit developed a set of internal guidelines that defined the actual behaviors from day to day. For example, the informal mission of the library staff is, "We do whatever it takes to get students what they need," even if the assistance is not specifically library-related. They also function as an "extended family" that "takes care of each other." Similarly, the grant unit staff's informal mission has become part of who they are what they do in addition influence students to adopt their positive behaviors. The adult education collaborators dedicated themselves to purposeful engagement. That is, they

actively participated in meetings that chronicled the progress of the collaboration, and they worked to ensure that staff in each partner organization shared the leaders' common vision. The accreditation team—guided by the college president's active mentoring, example, and high expectations—strove for excellence through developing the expertise of its members and by careful preparation.

Data across all four cases suggests the motivation for performing above minimum expectations comes from focusing on a vision. For example, the grant unit envisions every student who is willing to work as graduating. The adult education unit, as a national model, sees itself influencing the success of adult students throughout the nation through constant renewal and improvement of this model program. The accreditation committee sees itself contributing to the prestige and effectiveness of a community college nationally recognized for its excellence. Library staff members shared that "knowing we make a difference in the success of our students" motivates them to serve at all costs. The formal mission is important to the formal unit leaders but for unit members facing crises every day, it is crucial to have a vision and purpose that conveys that they matter, not only to those they serve but also to those they follow.

Authentic, Trusting, Inclusive Leadership

The leaders in this investigation demonstrated similar positive characteristics as they facilitated the exceptional functioning of their units. The stories of our unit leaders demonstrated the attributes of realistic optimism, emotional intelligence, confidence to succeed, and hope (Luthans, Luthans, Hodgetts, & Luthans, 2001). They show that although it might be possible to identify specific actions that appear to stem from a specific trait or behavior, as with other human attributes, they do not occur in isolation.

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As with all human attributes, these are intangible resources, and research has found these attributes to be more effective when demonstrated in combination (Luthans, 2002b).

For example, in the case of the accreditation team, the college president used most or all of these traits as she prepared for the college reaccreditation process. She knew her goal and the path to follow when early in the process she chose college leaders who would comprise the accreditation team. Her plan included training for those team members to assure they would achieve the goal of no recommendations for improvement. The appointed team members were also given the responsibility of collecting information from personnel in most college departments so their leader provided her executive support if things did not progress as planned.

The formal leaders that facilitated the adult education collaboration between a large community college and a large public school district believed they could create a successful adult education preparation plan for the area they serve. They used collaboration between two large organizations and their leaders as the path to achieve that goal. The executive formal leaders however did not stop there: They pledged their own continued involvement in the project and have kept that promise for over ten years. The will to succeed accompanied the plan to develop trusting relationships and maintain purposeful engagement. Without that leadership attitude, the program may not have received national recognition. Leaders who developed organizational collaboration without the exchange of a single dollar were confident that the team they were building would succeed, just as the college president was confident that her reaccreditation team would receive no recommendations for correction.

Because the SSS unit and college library units work with students daily, their leaders assist and encourage students, which is important for bolstering student retention. Students feel as if they matter when supported by people at the college. Library staff members use the same emotional intelligence to support each other through grief and the loss of loved ones by showing empathy and support.

Analysis of the data revealed that all leaders were focused and engaged and that leadership attributes and behaviors operate in combination with other attributes helping to explain how units are able to perform above expectations. All leaders in the four case studies were selfless, focused on the mission and vision of their unit, and trusted by their unit members. Although unit members other than the formal leader rarely identified themselves as leaders, the definition used in our study includes them as such. In the grant unit, having many leaders with the power to make decisions about resources created cohesiveness among the members.

Leaders within the four cases are authentic, feeling comfortable with who they are and what they believe and value. They act on their beliefs and values and act transparently with others (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004). This authenticity also includes acting selflessly, although the leaders demonstrated this trait differently. For instance, accreditation team leaders recognize publicly any contributors to the excellent results of the reaccreditation. SSS unit leaders give their members some choice of location for their professional development, whereas accreditation team leaders recognize the talent and tacit knowledge of employees in personal ways. They also address the needs of all the team members by providing additional professional development and training so team members are prepared to make informed decisions.

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Together, the leaders in this study demonstrate a consistent attitude of treating people as people rather than objects or abstract budgetary personnel account strings (Alfred et al., 2009; Shults, 2008). They empower, support, provide a purpose, and create opportunities to make a difference for those they lead. The director of the grant program displays all of these behaviors when she asks staff members to participate in the grant writing process. Each staff member represents her area of expertise as she works "off the clock" to prepare a new grant and willingly contributes to the new grant outcome through this process. Dividing the responsibility among all the unit members and sharing the consequences if the grant is not renewed is an example of shared accountability. In distributing accountability, the leader trusts the unit members to use their abilities and expertise to reach the unit goal. This trust, in turn, provides them with a sense of purpose over and above their daily responsibilities. The work also empowers the staff through involvement in the outcomes that affect their future.

Several similarities and differences were present across the case studies. One similarity was the presence of a supportive, collegial climate among participants in spite of differences in organizational structure and decision-making process. The length of service each person has worked within the unit and organization contributed to unit members' subjective experiences of feeling supported. One library team member described this as the "ease of long-standing acquaintance" that facilitated the ability to know without speaking how to help other unit members. Across each of the four cases, no individual has worked fewer than five years in the unit, and leaders recognized through title or responsibility have served in that unit capacity from eight to 20 years.

A noticeable difference across units is the way formal and informal leaders carry out administrative and managerial tasks. Some units were more hierarchal with a team leader or unit director assigning tasks. Other units function with a more distributed leadership whereby both informal and formal leaders share in the input and output of administrative and managerial tasks. This variation did not appear to hinder the high performance of the units. Areas influenced most by formal leadership include leadership style, culture, mission and vision, reputation, and a system of reward and recognition. All of the leaders not only influence the culture of their units, they may have created it as in the case of the SSS unit and the adult education collaboration. In the case of the library, the formal leaders are the driving force behind the existing culture. The SACS unit identified themselves as having a culture of excellence, the library a traditional hierarchy with a service orientation, the SSS unit prides itself on its leadership legacy of autonomy and support, and the culture that developed through the leaders of the adult education collaboration is defined a culture of trust.

Positive leaders trust in the capabilities and possibilities of their members to achieve unit goals, which paves the way for commitment to a shared vision and purpose that enhances a sense of shared accountability for outcomes. Adding to this positive environment are leadership actions that provide autonomy and support for all unit members. Autonomy and trust work together developing an environment where creativity and new ideas can flourish. Personnel trust that if an idea is not successful or if they make a mistake, they have access to whatever support they need to proceed toward the development of something new or to recover from a mistake. Of equal importance are leaders who appreciate team members as individual people not just positions. These

three in combination contributed to the success of all four units. While this is also an example of leveraging that evolves from the actions of the leaders, this leveraging may well occur by accident but with similar results as if they were intentional. However, if leaders understood and intentionally leveraged resources, the result might be even greater.

Resource Richness

Resource richness is our adaptation of the CCAM term *abundance*, a term that may be easily misunderstood to mean ample tangible resources (Alfred et al., 2009). We use resource richness to denote the condition that results when all available resources, both tangible and intangible, are optimally engaged. The four units achieved resource richness by looking beyond tangible resources. Their leaders and members did not view tangible resources as the primary constraining factors on their ability to achieve their high goals. Instead, by valuing their intangible resources, they were able to avoid being charmed by ample (or lacking) tangible resources. Adding these considerable intangible resources to available budgets, positions, equipment, and physical spaces created resource richness. From this position, unit leaders and members could create leverage and thereby enhance the effects of their tangible resources.

Tangible resources. All four units function under some sort of structured plan, a funding source, and a budget that describes relatively fixed amounts they have to work with. The importance of these tangible resources cannot be overemphasized. When leaders discussed resources and organizational functioning, they identified tangible resources, especially money as extremely important. However, they also discussed quantifiable resources such as staff positions. Authority over the amount and

disbursement of tangible resources varied from unit to unit. The leader of the adult

education collaboration, however, indicated with pride that no money changed hands

when the two leaders joined their organizations to deliver adult education and community

college preparation to a large population of students. Each unit continues to function

independently within its own strategic plan and funding source as it meets any legislative

mandate that supports its operation. The SACS accreditation team, however, had access

to whatever tangible resources they requested. Completing the assignment of sustaining

accreditation remains such a high priority that no request was denied. In all units, their

tangible resources can ebb and flow, but in the case of the grant program, their funding

can fluctuate annually and more often than not diminish year by year. To manage these

changes and maintain their high performance, the team members stay focused on the

things they can control and leverage other types of resources to accommodate for any lost

funding. All the units are fiscally responsible and adapt to shrinking tangible resources

when needed. In some cases, as in the adult education unit and grant program, asking for

community support can result in monetary donations from community organizations or

businesses. Yet these are not the only sources available to meet unit needs. Utilizing

intangible resources can expand possibilities to achieve unexpected results.

  In addition to careful stewardship of tangible resources, the units in our study

leveraged tangible resources with careful preparation for the future, including identifying

leveraging opportunities, focusing on resources that are within the unit's control, being

prepared, and providing professional development. Each unit derives benefits from

preparation. For example, the accreditation team leaders prioritized up-to-date data

collection and credential verification. This advance preparation supported their ability to

shepherd the reaccreditation process and complete it successfully with no recommendations for improvement. The administrative assistant for the SSS project developed a notebook containing all up-to-date documentation a site visit team from the department of education would require. The site visit team was so impressed with the notebook that they asked for a copy to use as a model for other sites. Library professionals make certain their committee responsibilities and reports are up to date, and adult education personnel prepare to meet the stringent reporting requirements. We found the more a unit makes a concerted effort to recognize and innovate with the resources, the greater its ability to perform with excellence.

  Intangible resources. With such a fluctuation in tangible resources, the four units used a variety of resources, not easily quantified, to assist them in reaching their goals. This type of resource amplification is rarely a straight line, cause-and-effect event. Two areas in particular, psychological capital and positive leadership were clearly capitalized in these high-performing units.

  Members of the SSS unit, displaying the characteristics of psychological capital, helped to develop and enhance those characteristics in students by modeling and encouraging desired behaviors, thus influencing the success of the unit purely through positive role modeling. Hope develops when a staff member assures a student he can succeed and helps devise a success plan. Accreditation members demonstrate self-efficacy through displays of confidence prior to an accreditation visit because they have prepared well. Library staff and professionals demonstrate resilience when they work together to manually manage a library printing queue in order to help students. Psychological capital, as an intangible resource, thus becomes a lever that amplifies the

capacity of unit members to meet their formal goals, serve their constituents, and respond to external pressures.

Important intangible resources prime for leveraging are the behaviors and traits of all unit members, formal leaders, informal leaders, and students who receive services. Whereas the core constructs of positive attributes of leadership (PAL) include confidence for the group to succeed, psychological capital emphasizes self-efficacy, the ability of an individual to perform a specific task with excellence. The resilience component of psychological capital is the ability of an individual or group to bounce back from adversity (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010; Froman, 2010; Luthans et al., 2001), and the emotional intelligence component of positive approaches to leadership is a relationship-focused attribute (Luthans et al., 2001).

Positive leadership can be found at all levels of the units examined because of the inclusive, people-first leadership structure. Behaviors prevalent in our investigation include treating people as people, building relationships, and collaborating with other entities. All the unit leaders value their personnel as individuals and professionals. The library director continued the care he traditionally shows to his staff during the holidays even through the pain of losing his daughter. The SSS unit director and her staff continued to serve students who needed their help, even when they could not count them as members of their program. Library personnel continued to take care of the students and faculty even when their staffing was short.

The library staff and professionals determined that they had not only reached but also surpassed the mark of excellence in student service. Their capacity to serve could have easily been diminished by a series of extremely difficult circumstances. However,

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their dedication, preparedness, and resilience buoyed their capacity to serve in the midst of pressing—even traumatic--difficulty. For example, their resilience was most evident as they continued delivering excellent service while at the same time supporting the needs of the library director who suffered the loss of two family members. Not only do unit members demonstrate these traits, they model the benefit of these attributes to the students they serve.

This expanded approach to organizational functioning insists that including intangible resources is paramount in the leveraging process in order to attain the best possible outcomes. Failure to develop and deploy intangibles creates *slack*, the unused set of resources that represent the leeway between what an organization could accomplish and what it does accomplish.

The units place a high value on people, the things that people can do, and the things that people need. The people in the units build relationships, collaborate, influence others, model behavior, learn, teach, grow, improve, nurture, and show concern. They benefit from autonomy and a sense of purpose. They feel valued, respected, and trusted. They have opportunities to learn and improve, make connections, and appreciate being unique. Things within their control include people, relationships with other organizations both inside and outside the college, and the talents of their own students. The previous examples provide evidence of how intangible resources can act as levers that amplify available tangible resources to increase the capacity for excellent performance. Finally, the influence of positive leadership itself is an intangible resource in the development of others. For example, a supervisor may encourage development in unexpected areas. A participant explains, "I was a teaching faculty, and I wanted to do more. My president

and academic dean saw something in me that maybe I never saw in myself, and I was given the opportunity to do things."

Regardless of the different organizational structures, all of our unit leaders kept their followers focused on the unit's mission from reaccreditation to organizational collaboration, to direct student service. Providing focus and direction produces stretch, the vision of results that seem out of reach based on current resources. This unit-level research confirms Hamel and Prahalad's (1994) assertion that stretch serves as a powerful motivation for learning to identify, develop, and deploy slack resources to produce resource amplification through leverage. Our research also supports the institution-level findings of Alfred et al. (2009) of the role of leadership and intangible resources in influencing exceptional performance. Finally, it supports individual- and group-level research studies that describe positive organizational outcomes enabled by positive dynamics in a group.

Conclusions

This multiple-case analysis of four community college units reveals the effects of positive organizational dynamics on unit success. We grouped our findings into three areas: (a) people-first culture; (b) authentic, trusting, inclusive leadership; and (c) resource richness. Within these areas, we noted how leaders and members attributed unit performance to positive characteristics and behaviors that were intentionally developed and nurtured. We described the importance of positive behaviors and traits in formal and informal leaders and how these contributed to unit performance. We also discussed the power of shared vision and informal mission for cohesion, motivation, and purpose in the units.

Leaders influence unit cultures in which (a) people are valued holistically and above other resources; (b) authentic leaders provide autonomy and support while organizing the units' work around strengths, and (c) unit leaders and members maximize all available resources. Formal leaders influence the culture of their unit, develop, and depend on shared leadership to focus on the overall mission, and facilitate leveraging all available resources.

The conclusions drawn from this four-case analysis are consistent with results of capacity-building, a component of the CCAM construct of abundance. In each unit, we found leaders skilled at identifying and developing their available tangible and intangible resources. The resulting leverage amplified the units' performance. At the unit level, there is great opportunity to facilitate leveraging. Unit members are the closest to where resources are actually used, and they are best positioned to identify slack resources—especially the intangible ones. Each person has control over resources—especially those that are unique to themselves. Examples include personal strengths, multiple relationships, interdepartmental collaborations, and the ability to pursue personal and professional development. Leaders beyond immediate supervisors may be too far removed to see opportunities to develop intangible resources at the individual level. Thus, when unit members are given the autonomy and support to develop and deploy those resources as they see fit, they have the potential to influence unit performance exponentially.

Recommendations

The following recommendations focus on innovating toward capacity building, leaders appreciating people as people, and leveraging all resources in the direction of

abundance. Leveraging can move an organization toward abundance; but an organization cannot maintain that state without continually using the tools that helped them get there. Resources available to leverage include positive authentic leaders and their attributes, accomplished employees who are encouraged to use all of their strengths including psychological capital, and a culture designed to utilize capacity building. Collectively, this combination of resources can achieve results greater than expected, based on current levels of tangible resources.

Becoming open and knowledgeable takes time, and it can seem risky. Thus, if someone is not ready to understand that process, it could take a long time to learn to think differently about leadership, resources, organizational culture, and performance. The following recommendations reflect the experience of our team members as we moved from acquaintance to understanding, to application, to assimilation of the principles of positive perspectives of unit performance, authentic leadership, and the leveraging of resources. Other teams and units can also experience a similar process:

- Become acquainted with capacity-building and leveraging intangible resources. The literature referenced in this report, the experiences of the units under investigation, and the brief appraisal of unit functioning included in this report can help interested parties become familiar with the positive terminology and processes.

- Understand the concepts through a learning experience facilitated by educators acquainted with the process of unraveling abstract concepts with examples, role-playing, observation, and conversation.

- Assimilate the concepts by looking at and identifying your own examples. Looking at your own daily practice through the new lens constantly reminds you that leveraging is all around us.

- Apply the concepts by choosing an example of a unit that could be improved, preferably your own, and detail a specific plan of action for that unit to learn and apply leveraging for capacity building.

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Further recommendations rest on our finding that individuals at all levels of the organizational chart control considerable resources of their own. For example, we have described the importance to team success of formal knowledge, such as one might acquire through training or education. We have also described ways of viewing culture, leadership, and resources that are at the same time familiar, yet difficult to translate into organizational vitality. These different perspectives are forms of tacit knowledge— intangible resources essential for building the capacity to amplify resources. Learning to operate these levers makes it possible to perform with excellence in an environment where resource levels and needs constantly change.

Further Study

This exploration of positive influences on unit-level performance leaves many questions unanswered and suggests avenues for further inquiry. For example, can the positive dynamics in successful individual units in higher education influence the performance of an entire college or university? If so, how and to what degree? Shifting the focus from units and institutions to individuals, can individual study of positive psychology and organizational dynamics influence team or organizational functioning? How and to what extent?

Leaders often mistake growth or plentiful tangible resources for high performance (Alfred et al., 2009). In doing so, they may assume that high performance comes from unique circumstances of growth or plentiful tangible resources. Attention is thus diverted from the possibilities for developing intangible resources that are essential for amplifying outputs regardless of available tangible resources. By contrast, the research reported here shows that when unit leaders add to their metrics of success the ability to identify and

deploy intangible resources, they develop the capacity to produce results thought to be impossible. It is tempting to ignore intangible resources, especially when tangible resources are plentiful (as in the case of the reaccreditation team) and even when scarce (as in the case of the library). Yet, consistent with the CCAM and positive literature, this study suggests that the key to outstanding unit performance is full utilization of all available resources achieved through special emphasis on intangible resources and desirable—and new—organizational outcomes. In order to produce a culture that supports this expansive view of organizational performance, we must first recognize that such units already exist and identify what exceptional performance looks like. This multi-case analysis has shown how positive organizational behaviors including attention to intangible resources can influence the ability to perform well in various contexts.

Appendix

Questionnaire for Leadership and Resources Perceptions

1. What are your position responsibilities in this program unit?

2. What is the relationship between your work and this program's overall performance?

3. In your program unit, what opportunities do staff members have to learn and grow?

4. In what ways are you empowered to carry out your position responsibilities?

5. What qualities of the formal leaders of your unit make them effective? What qualities of the informal leaders of your unit make them effective?

6. Describe techniques used by leadership to make everyone feel like an integral part of the unit?

7. Give an example of how unit members build upon strengths?

8. Give an example of how unit members value personal assets?

9. How does your unit deliver exceptional value to students?

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Chapter 3

Partnering For Excellence: Positive Leadership Approaches
In a National Model for Adult Education

Statement of the Problem

Educational policy makers and business leaders of the Commonwealth of Kentucky recognize that educational attainment and literacy are important components in addressing economic and social progress for the state's future (Zafft, Kallenbach, & Spohn, 2006). This is also true for the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS), with its vision "to be the nation's premier community and technical college system" (Kentucky Community & Technical College System, 2012, p.2). Among the many distinctions noted by the KCTCS system is serving as the largest system of higher education in Kentucky, educating more than 50% of all undergraduate students enrolled in public higher education in Kentucky as of January 2013 (Kentucky Community and Technical College System, 2013). As part of fulfilling the KCTCS mission to serve college and workforce readiness, fifteen community colleges delivered Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE) services in 31 counties with a total adult education enrollment of 11,834 from July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012. In these 31 KCTCS contracted counties, service providers served approximately 30 % of the total KYAE population and generated 23% of the total GEDs earned in the fiscal year 2012 (Kentucky Community and Technical College System, 2012).

Although the enrollment trends of adult education students served by KCTCS institutions in Kentucky has fluctuated throughout the years ranging from 29,033 in 2006 to 11,834 in 2012, little attention has been given to understanding how successful adult education units function (KCTCS Plan for the Competitive Commonwealth, 2006). The

lack of understanding of how successful adult education units function is primarily driven by limited research conducted on adult education units functioning and a general inability of some scholars and practitioners to recognize the role intangible resources play in contributing to organizational functioning. Furthermore, provision of adult education services is often accomplished through partnerships with external organizations and these relationships are rarely captured in traditional outcome measures. This study will help fill this gap in our understanding, moving from documenting enrollment patterns to understanding ways a partnership between a community college and K-12 school system contribute to positive organizational functioning. Positive organizational functioning within this study is defined as the presence of positive approaches of leadership, successful leveraging of resources both tangible and intangible and the presence of traits associated with psychological capital. Positive organizational functioning within this study means that the presence of positive approaches of leadership, successful leveraging of resources both tangible and intangible and the presence of traits associated with psychological capital collective form what will be referred to in this study as the positive lens. The findings will contribute to existing research on assessment of organizational functioning and provide helpful strategies intended to improve organizational performance.

Background of Study

Although adult basic education originated within the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, adult basic education started as a recognized program with the passage of the Adult Education Act of 1966 (Parker, 1990). The Adult Education Act distributes funds to the states for adult basic education programs offered through local education agencies,

community colleges, community-based organizations, workplaces, and correctional institutions (Crandall & Imel, 1991). Nationally, adult basic education programs serve as a major component of many continuing and community education units at community colleges. It is estimated that nearly half of the 1,200 community colleges in the United States provide adult education services (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2005).

Approximately three million Americans are enrolled in adult education programs each year. These students represent an estimated 7% of all community college enrollments (Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2005). Nationally, adult education is under the governance of community college boards or other postsecondary authorities in 13 states that have provided a foundation for linkage between adult education programs and postsecondary institutions. Both community colleges and adult educations programs have many similarities, including serving a disproportionate number of economically disadvantage students, sharing a strong culture of being student centered, promoting an access-oriented philosophy to meet students' needs, establishing a flexible program structure, and providing instruction that is highly content focused. These characteristics serve as a foundation for linking adult education units with community colleges.

Prior to the national movement of adult education, Kentucky was among the first to address the issue of illiteracy within its citizenry through a coordinated program. This framework served as an outline for establishing national programs and federal legislation for adults who sought assistance in basic learning (Moore, 1984). Efforts to meet the educational needs of adults through adult education programs began in the

Commonwealth of Kentucky at the turn of the century with the creation of moonlight schools. In 1911, in the Appalachian mountain region of Kentucky, Cora W. Stewart was instrumental in establishing a program that helped adults overcome illiteracy by conducting schools operating only on moonlit nights so people could find their way to and from school safely. Hence, the schools became known as moonlight schools. These evening classes spurred a social movement to educate the citizenry in order to diminish poverty.

Today, Kentucky's efforts to promote literacy and basic education to its adult citizens continue as a means to promote the well-being of each resident and of the state. Approximately 410,000 working-age adults in Kentucky do not have a high school diploma or GED (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary, 2012). An effort to increase access to adult education services and a desire to promote the transition of Kentuckians from secondary education to post-secondary education has led to increased collaboration between two state agencies— the Kentucky Community College and Technical System (KCTCS) and Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE). Kentucky's community colleges and adult education programs are managed by these separate state agencies under the auspices of the Council of Postsecondary Education (CPE). KCTCS was legislatively created in 1997 and KYAE was created in 2000.

Adult education units in Kentucky have played an integral role in addressing the literacy challenges existing across the state. An adult education program located in every county of the Commonwealth provides academic instruction in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies to help adults improve their literacy skills, earn a general education diploma (GED), prepare for college and employment, and learn English as a

second language (ESL). Adult education units also provide programmatic family literacy services designed to prepare parents with instruction in basic academic skills, life skills, parenting skills, and employability skills (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 1997). More specifically, adult education units in Kentucky target residents who are at least 16 years old and have officially withdrawn from high school. Additionally, high school graduates with literacy skills below the 12th-grade level are eligible for adult education services (Kentucky Council of Postsecondary Education, 2012).

The organizational structures of adult education units take many forms through different fiscal agents throughout the state of Kentucky. Organizations submit formal bids to become fiscal agents that demonstrate their ability to meet the mission of adult education. Fiscal agents include local education agencies, community-based organizations of demonstrated effectiveness, volunteer literacy organizations of demonstrated effectiveness, institutions of higher education, public or private nonprofit agencies, libraries, and public housing authorities. Becoming a fiscal agent means an organization becomes the exclusive providers of adult education service in a specific community.

Recognizing the increasing role of community colleges as key providers in adult education, KYAE and KCTCS have actively encouraged and promoted transitions between adult education and postsecondary education. In 2002-2003, 13 colleges provided adult education, serving more than 18,700 learners representing almost 20% of all adult education enrollments. By 2005-2006, the number of adult education enrollments exceeded 29,000 and the number of KCTCS college providers increased to 14 colleges in the state (Chisman, 2004). Although the performance of adult education

providers among the KCTCS community colleges varies, some KCTCS adult education

providers have served as national models for linkages between adult education and

postsecondary institutions {Chisman, 2004). The unit of study for this research is one of

these successful programs, representing a partnership between a secondary public school

system and a local community college to provide adult education. This partnership also

serves individuals who have not achieved a secondary school diploma or its recognized

equivalent, or are unable to speak, read, or write in English.

The community college within KCTCS selected for this study is an urban two-

year public college with a fall 2011 enrollment of 15,092. The secondary school system

is located in an urban community with a district-wide enrollment of 100,287. The

collaboration of these two agencies produced an adult education partnership program

designated as the Educational Enrichment Services (EES). The main purpose of the EES

program is to encourage adult learners to transition to college. Indicative of the

program's success, it has been recognized as a program of distinction by the National

Alliance of Community and Technical Colleges (Texas Higher Education Coordinating,

2008). Program participants are able to access remedial education while remaining in a

college environment and taking other developmental or college credit courses.

For the purposes of continuous improvement, each year adult education programs

of each county are placed into one of three program categories, Excellence, Proficient,

and Needs Improvement, by the KYAE based on final enrollment and performance data

for the previous fiscal year (Kentucky Community and Technical College System, 2012).

Additionally, KYAE recognizes their Top 25 programs for FY 2012, defined by average

rankings in achieving enrollment, academic performance, and GED attainment. Eleven

of the top 25 programs were KCTCS providers (Kentucky Community and Technical College System, 2012). The program in this study qualified as one these top 25 programs. Thus, this study focuses on an adult education program recognized as one of the top performers in the state.

Conceptual Framework

The Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) has conducted a national study of community colleges on state adult education systems, several studies on adult education including four statewide case studies and a study of adult education experience in five states (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2005). These studies focus on broader state wide adult education policy. This study was guided by literature found in the Community College Abundance Model (CCAM) and positive approaches to leadership (PAL), that collectively form the positive lens used to explore positive phenomena, behaviors, and traits.

In addition, several studies have looked at various aspects of adult education specifically in Kentucky including non-participation in adult education {Jensen, 2000); family literacy (Peyton, 2007); transitioning adults to college (Zafft et al., 2006); and the role and potential of community colleges in adult education and literacy (Chisman, 2004). These studies focus on the problems in delivery of adult education services or completion. In contrast, this study differs from the existing literature on adult education in that it attempts to understand what works well in organizations offering adult education, particularly in organizations working in partnership to provide such services and why it works well, as it relates to the organizational functioning.

The Community College Abundance Model (CCAM) (Alfred et al., 2009) is adapted and applied in this study as a framework to examine the ways a partnership between a community college and a K-12 school-based adult education program achieved success. CCAM describes a framework of performance called the *abundance model,* which attempts to explain why some community college organizations reach unexpected levels of organizational functioning and performance and others do not (Alfred, 2009). Within this model, a community college can be located on an abundance continuum based on the presence of positive characteristics and behaviors demonstrated by the leaders and members of the organization.

Community colleges on the abundance continuum range from *colleges of challenge* (identified as under-performing, under-leveraged, and underfunded), to *colleges of choice* (identified as colleges that avoid crisis and disaster), to *colleges of abundance* (identified thorough transcendent leveraging of resources). A unique aspect of the CCAM is the focus on the leveraging of tangible, intangible, and leadership resources (Cameron, 2003). Tangible resources refer to the quantifiable resources such as staff, money, technology, and facilities. Intangible resources refer to non-quantifiable resources such as culture, reputation, and human capabilities. The term *leadership resources* refers to the ability to develop strategic capabilities in staff and to nurture leaders in the organization (Alfred, 2009).

According to Luthans, Luthans, Hodgetts, & Luthans (2001), PAL is a proactive approach to leadership that draws from both Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) and positive psychology. PAL is comprised of four components, realistic optimism, emotional intelligence, confidence, and hope. PAL extends beyond simply positive

thinking and feels good messages. What distinguishes PAL from other leadership models that emphasize a general positive attitude or feel good message positive approach to leadership's strong research and theoretical underpinning drawn from POB criteria of being measureable, open to development, and manageable in both self and others to improve performance (Luthans, 2002).

Because of the unique partnership between the community college and the K-12 system, the concept of collaboration was also included in this research as a key to positive organizational functioning. Two types of collaboration literature exist within organizational studies, intra-collaboration, and inter-collaboration (Wood & Gray, 1991; Kezar, 2006). External collaboration studies typically investigate why collaborations occur. Generally, external collaboration in steering committees, K-16 partnerships, stakeholder groups, and external networks are formed to produce some tangible outcome as a result of the collaboration; however, within the field of external collaboration studies, many studies focus on barriers to collaborations (Wood & Gray, 1991). Internal collaboration studies focus on areas such as cross-functional teams, interdisciplinary teaching and research, and student and academic affairs collaboration (Kezar, 2006).

Some studies in the higher education collaboration literature have investigated individual and group conditions that lead to or enhance collaboration such as leadership, common goals, or personalities and attitudes of individuals in the collaboration (Kezar, 2003) and rewards or incentives (Martin & Murphy, 2000). By contrast to this study, other studies have largely focused on various deficits including division of labor, specialization among faculty, lack of common purpose or language between faculty and staff, lack of common purpose between administration and faculty and barriers to

academic and student affairs collaboration (Love & Love, 1995; Schroeder & Hurst, 1996).

According to Kanter (1994), several elements are essential to fostering effective collaboration including collaboration that functions and cultivates a familial culture and relationships, particularly when interactions between individuals are emphasized as opposed to formal agreements, structures, or processes. Additional research on essential characteristics to effective collaboration suggests that a sense of shared values between groups or a set of values that attract people together can create the conditions to create and sustain a strong collaborative partnership (Philpott & Strange, 2003, Tjosvold & Tsao, 1989). Overall, the literature on collaboration has guided this study by underscoring how collective benefits can be attained by building on the strengths of individuals across organizations.

This literature on the abundance model and lessons learned from research on inter-organizational collaboration provide a foundation for the following research questions:

> How is superior organizational functioning and performance in this adult education program influenced by positive phenomena, behaviors, and traits, including:
>
> > (a) positive approaches to leadership;
> >
> > (b) the successful leveraging of available resources, both tangible and intangible?

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study is a qualitative exploratory case study. Multiple methodological considerations justify the appropriateness of case study method for this inquiry. Case

studies are appropriate for (a) investigating questions of *how* and *why* (Yin, 2009;

Fitzpatrick, 2004), (b) observing a "contemporary set of events" (Yin, 2009, p.13), and

(c) understanding situations "over which the investigator has little or no control" (Yin,

2009, p.13). This study fits each of these qualifications.

Theorists consider *boundedness* to be the distinguishing characteristic of cases,

and therefore of the case study method (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Boundedness indicates a clear idea about what is included in the case and what is not.

While they can often be set early in the study design phase, boundaries may be adjusted

during data collection and analysis in response to unexpected events such as changes in

organizational boundaries (Simons, 2009). Examples of typical boundaries include

setting limits on the number of participants to be interviewed and restricting data

collection to a finite period. In this study, the creation of *a priori* conceptual categories

of what constitutes a unit based on the provision of services and, in the case of

partnership, the shared goals for service set boundaries for exploration and discovery that

were consistent with the literature identified in the conceptual framework.

In qualitative research, the purpose of the analysis goes beyond hypothesis testing

into the discovery of meanings in participant communication (Saldaña, 2009).

Qualitative case study method was selected because it could best answer the question of

how the unit utilizes positive attributes as described in CCAM in order to achieve

success. Also, the case study method can provide a holistic view in this case of how and

why an adult education unit works well from the perspective of adult education

participants and program administration (Yin, 2009). Although understanding one

program, in and of itself, may not allow results to be generalized to all programs, it may

provide a clear understanding of particular attributes that contribute to abundant program effectiveness.

Qualitative case studies provide thick description and a holistic approach making possible the identification of reasons and characteristics that cannot be separated from their context (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009; Stake, 1995). While this study will not establish a causal relationship, it complements research already conducted and fits Yin's (2009) definition as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (p. 18)." It is a case study using CCAM and PAL as a positive lens to explore and explain characteristics about organizational performance and positive organizational behaviors critical to achieve success.

The researcher selected the particular partnership between a community college and a K-12 school system identified here because of its recognition for serving as a national model for adult education. A national report funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education entitled *Staying the Course: Factors Influencing Enrollment and Persistence in Adult Education* highlighted this unit, its unique partnership, and service program as a national model of practices to help improve participation and persistence in adult education (Tolbert, 2004). The publication noted practices needed to ensure quality and success in student learning. Specifically," leveraging resources and forming partnerships to market and expand program offerings and other services to learners." (Tolbert, 2004, p.9). The emphasis on partnerships and the leveraging of resources is consistent with attributes identified in the Community College Abundance Model (CCAM).

In addition to being recognized as a national model, this adult education unit met all of its state mandated performance measures with the exception of its GED goal, including increased educational functional levels, enrollment, and academic performance. This success led to its recognition of being a program of excellence for the year in 2011 by the KYAE.

The EES program examined in this study originated in August 2003 between the secondary school district located in one of the local high schools and the local Community and Technical College in a formal partnership to serve GED graduates and other adult education eligible students whose college entrance exam scores fall below a designated level. Students who enter into the adult education unit follow the college's course schedule both in time and structure. Instructors are paid by the secondary school district and the facilities are provided by the college. The classes are free of charge and students have had the benefit of saving approximately $450,000 in tuition during the 2009-10 academic year, for example. The EES program enrollment for the 2009-10 year was 1,205, and 923 students transitioned into the college system in 2010-11.

The researcher assumed a non-participant status role. Four strategies were employed to gather information on the structure and content of the unit's functioning: an online questionnaire; in-person interviews with administrators, faculty, and students participating in the adult education program; the state's adult education documents; and observations at the site. Preliminary data was collected before any formal research activities began. The following steps were undertaken and data collected before actual observations and interviews began:

An introduction letter that was followed by a phone call was given to participants to explain the purpose of the research that was being conducted and to determine a time to interview (see Appendix A).

Additional assistance from the college president's administrative assistant was enlisted to collect information about the college, which included the organizational chart and annual reports. This information was used to develop an understanding of the environment and to provide insight into potential questions that might have surfaced during the interviews and observations, and to become familiar with the names of members of the college administrative team.

Information was collected about the secondary school, which included the organizational chart and annual reports. This information was used to determine the location of the adult education unit, understanding of the environment, and to become familiar with the names of the members of the adult education unit.

A preliminary questionnaire was administered prior to the in-person interviews. The questions centered on the positive attributes of leadership and perceptions of resources (see Appendix D). Positive approaches to leadership include the components of realistic optimism, emotional intelligence, confidence, and hope. A positive approach to leadership is a dimension of the positive lens used in this study as a proactive leadership attribute.

The results of this preliminary questionnaire helped guide the in-person interviews that were conducted from July 2011 through October 2011. The interviews were conducted on the campus of the community college, on the campus of the secondary school system, and at the Kentucky Community and Technical College System's office.

Data were gathered from current full-time members of the Adult Education

administration, staff, and faculty at the secondary school system, current full-time

administration and faculty from the community college, and current full-time

administration from the Kentucky Community and Technical College System office.

Approval was gained from both the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board

and the Research Ethics Committee of KCTCS.

Interviews consisted of open-ended questions or discussion prompts to help

understand how the areas identified as part of the positive lens, containing: (a) positive

qualities of leadership, and (b) the successful leveraging of available resources. The

following questions guided the semi-structured interviews:

- What are your position's responsibilities in this Adult Education Unit (AEU)?

- What is the relationship between your work and this AEU's overall
  performance?

- In your AEU, what opportunities do staff members have to learn and grow?

- In what ways are you empowered to carry out your position's responsibilities?

- What qualities of the formal leaders of your unit make them effective?

- What qualities of the informal leaders of your unit make them effective?

- Describe techniques used by leadership to make everyone feel like an integral
  part of the unit?

- Give an example of how unit members build upon strengths?

- Give an example of how unit members value personal assets?

All interviews were recorded using a digital device and a transcription service was

used to transcribe the recordings. Participants were then provided copies of interview

transcripts in order to make any adjustments or corrections to the transcripts (Stake,

1995). The three-month time frame allowed for visits by the researcher to the site to

confirm the researcher's interpretation of the conversations or pursue additional areas of questioning.

In addition to conducting the interviews, the researcher observed the functioning of the EES program during several classroom sessions and unit meetings. The researcher examined the physical artifacts located in the setting, finding evidence consistent with the focus of the research on the positive lens as described in CCAM and PAL. Institutional and unit data were also collected in the areas of adult education performance and accountability.

Data Analysis & Validity

Throughout the research process, the researcher monitored subjectivity to explore how the researcher's beliefs may distort the data or findings by using memos to document decisions made to manage and interpret the data. This involved the researcher maintaining written and audio logs on different perspectives of the data.

The researcher maintained a reflective stance by revisiting the original transcript and documents throughout the analysis process, continuously asking questions related to the interpretation of data, and soliciting rival theories to interpretations made by the researcher (Yin, 2009).

Code and code families were derived from the study's set of research objectives to be used as an initial framework for analysis. Codes and themes were collected and analyzed using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis version 6.2.27 software package. Recurring phrases were assigned a code to illustrate the relationships between the interview, document data, and questionnaire data. An integral component of the data analysis was focusing on repetitive phrases that emerged from the data not otherwise

explained by the language used in interview questions or project explanations. These repetitive phrases were coded and grouped into code families. Code families are larger conceptual categories that represent the research objective and that serve to organize thematically the system of codes (Saldaña, 2009). Particular attention was given to statements that emerged in the interview transcript and field notes indicating positive traits described in the literature. In addition, discrepant cases, or instances where a priori assumptions might have been challenged, were also examined to elaborate the researcher's understanding of the program studied.

Emergent Themes

This section will present themes generated from the responses to the research questions in this study. Meaning was developed jointly by both the researcher and participants involved in the study. Consequently, study findings will be presented using themes developed directly from the participants own words and experiences. Analysis of the interview transcripts and questionnaires identified the following emergent themes for the purposes of this study:

1. Trust Building
2. Development of Unit Optimism and Talent
3. Purposeful Engagement to Advance a Common Goal

What follows is an explanation and discussion of each of the emergent theme categories above.

Trust Building

Trust building in collaborations among higher education institutions is important because higher education institutions are professional organizations where individuals are influenced and persuaded by peers (Birnbaum, 2002). A theme that emerged from the

participants was trust building within the unit and across the partnership. The interview

data, questionnaires, and observations provided insight into how leaders are perceived

throughout the organization and how these perceptions influence the organizational

function of the unit. Prior to the creation of the partnership, a deep sense of mistrust,

fear, and uncertainty about the future permeated throughout the community college and

the secondary school district adult education unit that created an unhealthy environment.

The mistrust was caused by the previous community college president's aspiration to

compete with the secondary school district as the fiscal agent of adult education services.

Fear existed among community college faculty members who were afraid of losing their

jobs as a result of teaching fewer development education courses as a result of the

partnership. Uncertainty about how the partnership would operate daily, and if the

number of students leaving the college as developmental students would return to the

college stronger students. Trust building was essential to creating a healthier

environment was s that forged the partnership between the adult education unit and the

community college. A program coordinator explained the

> So when the new college president came on board, the Adult Education Director,
> being the visionary she is, realizes that perhaps the time was right to rebuild that
> bridge that kind of got burnt in the mix of that competition.

The fostering and development of trust renewed and re-energized the capacities of

individuals across both organizations to achieve greater leverage of intangible resources

within the unit. A unit faculty member identified character and traits of the Adult

Education Director important to building trust within the unit and across the partnership.

She described the director as "flexible, caring, knowledgeable, team leader, visionary,

positive (can-do) attitude, innovative, good communicator, and diplomatic." The CCAM

literature intimates that leaders who inspire trust are able to effectively initiate and lead

change in organizations (Alfred et al., 2009) and positive psychology suggest that flourishing and virtuousness can shield negative effects of setbacks like mistrust by improving the ability to endure and recover. Both formal and informal leaders displayed to ability to build trust and resilience needed to propel the unit towards success.

Members from the community college and secondary school district worked to create trust between the two organizations that historically had viewed each other as competitors for similar students. For example, a program coordinator described a seminal moment for individuals across the partnership and within the unit that was later characterized by a senior administrator of the college as a "huge leap of faith and an informed risk on the part of the college." She states:

> Honesty, trust, and vision on both parties and a willingness to be very honest in terms of bringing outcomes to the table, where the adult education director said, "This is my world, this is the context of the world that I have to operate in. I am held accountable for these things. I have these outcomes to achieve, and I have these resources to accomplish them."

Several respondents provided insight and context into the importance of collaboration among leaders to build trusts between two organizations, particularly the college president. The president described how his presence at monthly meetings created resilience and understanding needed to cultivate trust building, which the researcher interpreted as one lever of intangible resource that influenced superior organizational functioning and performance. Positive psychology asserts that institutions play a role in creating environments that enable flourishing whereby a feedback loop is present to support the positive experience of individuals to flourish within the group. The president explained, "We have some strong personalities and some really excellent ones, so there was initial pushback at meetings. But the program itself has produced so many positive accomplishments that it is its own reward." What distinguishes this successful unit's

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meetings from other units that may meet frequently is that leadership roles within each

monthly meetings changes each month. Although program review is the primary focus of

each meeting, individuals from the secondary school district and the community college

each serve in rotating chairman ship roles to sustain trust within the partnership. An

outcome of these monthly meetings between both organization is a revision of the

Memorandum of Agreement between the community college and the secondary school

district whereby by programmatic cut scores, placement policies, and student success are

adjusted based upon input from the monthly meetings. As one individual explained,

> We just had a lot of meetings, and we still meet on a monthly basis, even though
> this year I've been to about every other meeting recently. But the adult education
> director and I come to those meetings with our promos, and she has her top people
> there as well as key instructors. And, there's an agenda every time. But, I think
> that those meetings are critical to a partnership like this.

A senior community college administrator concurs and explained an integral component
of the unit's success is rooted in the composition of individuals who contribute to the
overall functioning of the unit. She states, "We have an Adult Education Advisory
Council that is comprised of members from the community that are leaders and decision
makers." Specifically, she described the leadership approach, particularly from the
community college president, as collaborative:

> The college president providing leadership on the college's end, along with his
> academic deans and other true leadership within the college with the Adult
> Education director from the very beginning contributed to the success. I think
> what contributed to the success was that the leadership came to the table, the
> people who had the authority and the resources to make commitments to build
> that collaboration.

The literature suggests some unique elements about trust in organizations,

particularly in relation to collaborations in higher education. Kezar (2006) contends that

mechanisms for people to interact are key to developing and sustaining relationships in

collaborations. Indeed, what emerges from this study are examples of effective ways to

build trust at the unit level. Continuity with findings of other studies underscores the

importance of networks and relationships (Kezar, 2001). The finding from this study

expands our understanding of the significance of trust at the unit level in collaborations.

Development of Unit Optimism and Talent

The development of a national reputation for a partnership and program of

excellence allowed the unit to develop optimism that created increased capacity to serve

program participants and the community. According to Luthans et al. (2001), a

component of PAL is the presence of an attribute known as realistic optimism whereby a

leader demonstrates leniency for the past, appreciation for the present, and opportunity

seeking for the future as a proactive approach to challenges and problems. The national

reputation has served as an intangible resource operating as a lever of sort to optimize the

unit's functioning to levels that were previously unattainable prior to the creation of this

partnership. The national reputation provided a sense of optimism that catapulted each

unit to think differently about adult education's mission and purpose moving forward.

An example of opportunity seeking for the future described in PAL is illustrated by the

community college president's description of his outlook for the future as a result of the

EES program success. He explains,

> What I see in terms of vision for the future is that we'll be able to continue to
> build on the EES program because adult education is so critically important and
> so often [a] neglected element of the discussion in post-secondary education. You
> know, all the discussion about college related focus[es] on the high schools, and
> that's probably appropriate, but we can't forget adult education. So that
> partnership will continue to be important.

Another dimension that emerged from members of faculty and staff was the

emphasis on professional development to increase the capacity of the unit's ability to

perform. The development of interpersonal and technical skills is reinforced both

formally and informally across the unit, which promotes the development of human

capital by building on strengths at the individual and unit level. Informally, members are crossed-trained in different aspects of each other's jobs. Formally, individuals must have 24 professional development hours from the state and another 24 hours from the county; these are mandated each year by the K-12 school system. Lifelong learning is strongly encouraged and modeled by administrative staff, particularly new approaches to strengthening pedagogy and curriculum that allow staff members the opportunity to learn, try out new ideas, and grow professionally from the development of new skills. For example, the unit initiated professional development on common core standards to improve student learning one year before it was uniformly implemented throughout all adult education providers.

Mohrman, Cohen, and Mohrman (1995), examined effective collaborations and found that people need to be trained and given skill development in the area of collaboration. The CCAM literature intimates that successful organizations are able to attract and recruit talented staff by offering professional development opportunities, better compensation, and other intangible benefits by creating an environment that provides unique, "signature experiences" that is distinctive from being a part of other organizations. The strong sense of optimism garnered from the partnership's national reputation, coupled with professional development opportunities, promotes shared accountability and signature experiences for both organizations.

This finding reaffirms existing literature on collaborations asserting that shared vision, mission, and valuing people with coordination procedures and cooperative interaction reinforce each other (Tjosvold & Tsao, 1989), and it expands what we know about how optimism influences functioning at the unit level.

In summary, the development of unit optimisim and talent within an environment of collabortion, shared vision, and a strong sense of optimsim cultivated by a sense of pride in sustaining a national recognized program can promote superior positive organizational functioning as ilustrated among participants in this unit. The investment in individuals skills throuch cross-training and professional development activities as well as the ability to create a sense of purpose among two collaborating agencies influences high-performing functioning.

Purposeful Engagement to Advance a Common Goal

The theme of purposeful engagement to advance a common goal best describes how members purposefully engage to advance the common goal of supporting the transition of adult education students to the community college. Meaningful interactions among unit members to achieve a common goal through specific tasks contributed to the amplification of tangible and intangible resources, allowing the unit to perform tasks that otherwise may not have been deployed and successfully accomplished. Members of the faculty and staff of the community college were credited with embracing informed risks by collaborating with the adult education program. While facing known risks that potentially could have resulted in less than desirable outcomes, Unit members displayed enhanced capacity-building by embracing a "freedom to fail" attitude through informed, evidence-based risk-taking. A respondent provides context to the type of risk-taking used to good purpose at the community college that illustrates both confidence and realistic optimism described in PAL:

> The risks they were taking are that they were doing some things that they knew were not really covered in existing KCTCS system policy and procedures. They were doing things that flew in the face of—and, quite frankly, still are not aligned with—the system's assessment and placement policy.

An adult education staff member reminds us of the value of intangible resources:

> Our biggest intangible resource is our students. They tend to go out and tell other folks. Our best advertising method is word of mouth. So if we provide a good product, which is good services to these students, which is what we're all about, they're going to tell their friends and I don't have to worry about marketing resources and those kinds of things. That's an intangible.

The CCAM literature suggests that partnering and collaboration are normal in high-performing organizations because progress is evaluated in terms of growth inside and outside of the organizations. The Adult Education Director describes the purposeful engagement in action as she garnered support for a GED testing initiative:

> I've got the people right here at the table and there is energy and synergy by having those people at the table. It was the executive director of our local Workforce Investment Board said, "Well, I can contribute $5,000 dollars." So then the person with the library said, "Well, I can contribute $5,000 dollars." The person that was the President of Sullivan University said, "And I can contribute $5,000 dollars and if you need more, I'll double it."

The adult education director explained the impetus to creating the partnership to produce benefit for both organizations that demonstrates what PAL describes as leniency for the past whereby formal and informal leaders display the ability to accept what they cannot change rather than condemn and blame (Luthans et al., 2001). She explains her initial meeting with the new community college president:

> We need to partner. So we decided dollars would not change hands; that we would just look at the resources each respective institution had and that we would join forces and make it work. So that's how we got started.

The president of the community college echoed a similar starting point that began and advanced purposeful engagements by soliciting other strategic partners to advance a shared vision, and other broader college goals. This illustration provides an example of how strategic leveraging of external stakeholders can enhance the organization opportunity to create greater value for stakeholders that otherwise may not have been achievable as described in the CCAM model. He states,

> But this partnership worked so well that it just kind of opened the door. I mean, at this point our college has partnerships all across-the-board of workforce development, and with different components of Jefferson County Public Schools. I mean, I can give you a list of five or six other partnerships with JCPCS that are beyond the norm, but the first one was this blockbuster partnership.

The adult education director provides context to how the nature of the partnership within and across the partnership has evolved over the years to advance purposeful engagement to achieve a common goal. She explains,

> Everybody understands how decisions are made. That's also a critical piece of teamwork that has helped us to be a stronger group. I reserve the right to make the final decision. It's not a democracy, however it's not an aristocracy either.

Individuals within the unit explain why purposeful engagement is important to them personally and in doing so revealed self-efficacy characteristics and traits described in both CCAM and in the PAL model as a component of confidence. PAL describes self-efficacy as "an individual's conviction about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context" (Luthans, et al., 2001, p.14). An adult education staff member explains,

> I think our rewards are intrinsic. Our teachers come here because they want to make a difference. I think they are high qualified and could make probably tons of money elsewhere, because they are high qualified, but they work with us because they do care about the students and they care about this program.

Finally, a different dimension of the unit's purposeful engagement across the unit is reflected in how the unit seeks to continuously improve their processes to enhance the services they provide. Both formal and informal leaders engage in a Process Check, which involves evaluating significant programs, activities, and policies throughout the year. The evaluation involves asking three key questions: (1) Is this what we want to do this year? (2) How do we want to change?, and (3) Did we make one significant change about how we collect the data? When examining this unit through a positive lens, members across the unit consistently demonstrated the behavior of promoting a collaboration their interactions with one another. What has been found in this study at the unit level expands on a question raised in previous CCAM research on the effectiveness of the administrative organization: "Is it possible that the structure of the network(s) a college is part of is more important than its administrative structure?" (Alfred et. al, 2009, p. 262). The findings from this study underscore both the power and importance of collaborating with clear common purpose to advance a shared common goal. The beneficiaries of this unique partnership extend well beyond the individuals who participate in the delivery of the services and the consumers who seek out program offerings.

Implications for Practice

Participants' voices support the view that a high-performing unit's function is positively influenced by the presence of positive leadership that supports, fosters and embraces collaboration, risk-taking, trust building, and synergy to advance a common goal. Whether working through research or practice, those working with college students

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must be willing to take risks to create innovative organizational units that provide seamless pathways for student success.

Participants in the study echoed the work described in the literature of PAL, POB, and CCAM, suggesting that the combination of positive experiences, positive leveraging of resources and positive approaches to leadership can influence and contribute to successful organizations. Practitioners must consider policies and structures existing within the environments of organizations that contribute to the daily operation of units as well as broader tangible and intangible leadership skills of leaders within units. However, as Alfred et al. (2009) cautioned, we must also allow leaders to lead, and develop a culture that contributes to high-performing units including building upon strengths and valuing the assets of others within the organization.

Practitioners should also recognize the delicate balance between the type of leaders and leadership needed to create and sustain a high-performing unit and the requisite culture essential to allowing the unit to flourish. Becoming a high-performing organizational unit is not a linear process. Participants repeatedly expressed feelings of moving back and forth in the cultivation of processes and practices that have created the current environment. Educational decision maker can support struggling units by understanding factors that contribute to the fluidity of successful positive organizational functioning. These factors illuminated effective ways to assist practitioners to develop new approaches to leveraging resources necessary to support aspiring high-performing organizations.

The CCAM model for abundance (Alfred et al, 2009) noted common patterns of behavior for leadership in abundant/high-performing organizations: (1) Leaders and staff

look at the college as a human community, not growth machine; (2) leaders and staff are committed to developing strategic capabilities; (3) leaders and staff draw heavily on a shared understanding of institutional mission and vision as the basis for their work; (4) leaders and staff balance problem-solving and people-valuing activities to build a capability for leveraging; (5) leaders and staff collectively adhere to values governing human aspects of the organization-risks, civility, wellness, virtuousness, forgiveness, vitality; (6) leaders and staff work together to foster institutional "core" culture, while simultaneously respecting individual differences; (7) leaders and staff actively thing about the meaning of what they do in terms of the wider world in which they live; and (8) leaders and staff believe that the primary outcome of education is societal value.

The partnership teaches us that with a modicum of risk taking by informal and formal leaders benefits, both planned and coincidental, can arise from trust building, purposeful engagement with a shared common goal, and the leveraging of intangible resources to individuals within the unit and beyond.

Limitations of the Study

Although I believe the study offers new insight into the functioning of an organizational unit, there are limitations to the work. An important limitation of this study is that this research focused only on partnerships external to organizations (rather than focusing only on internal relations and unit functioning) to help me understand effective organizations better. An alternative research design that incorporates individuals as part of the unit of analysis can provide a more complete picture of individual traits and characteristics needed within a high-performing organizational unit. This alternative research design may yield the development of a typology to support the

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findings from this study, which focused exclusively on the organization as the unit of analysis. The findings are based on the experiences of individuals from both organizations; hence, the findings may not apply to other adult education units.

Conclusion

This study revealed several critical ideas for understanding organizational functioning through a positive organizational lens. My research was guided by one overarching question—how is superior organizational functioning and performance influenced by positive phenomena, behaviors, and traits, including: (a) positive approaches to leadership, and (b) the successful leveraging of available resources, both tangible and intangible? Participants contributed to the knowledge around the phenomenon by sharing their experiences and describing their perspectives on behaviors and traits. The findings from this study provide us with a richer, more nuanced understanding of what the CCAM labeled a *distributed organization* whereby units "operate independently from one another as a confederation of loosely connected silos serving uniquely different markets" (Alfred et al., 2009, p. 257), illustrating how trust, risk taking, collaboration, and positive purposeful engagement to advance a common goal can influence separate organizations towards successful outcomes.

This case study adds to our understanding of successful units that may be loosely coupled, and it reaffirms the importance of bridging the gap in the knowledge surrounding the organizational functioning of adult education units in two practical ways: First, understanding what works well in the organizational functioning of a successful adult education unit may provide effective practices that can be explored and shared with other adult education units. There are complex connections between the analytic

concepts of leadership and the leveraging of tangible and intangible resources, which can increase awareness of how organizations function. The demonstration and reinforcement by leaders of espoused values, group norms, and commitment to organizational values and mission allows the leveraging of intangible and tangible resources by leaders. Secondly, the participants' experiences illustrated the challenging environment of increasing educational persistence, performance, and progress in a setting with a sizable number of students dropping out after the first year.

Recommendations

Three salient ideas can advance our understanding of organizational functioning in units. First, the development of trust from both formal and informal members of the unit plays an integral role in navigating changing environments, particularly when leaders embrace risk-taking, collaboration, flexibility, and innovation. Second, members of organizational units can benefit from activities that develop optimism within the unit and across the organization. Third, purposeful engagement to advance a common goal can yield outcomes beyond the capabilities of organizations when organizations have engaged in trust-building rooted in a shared vision and common goals. Fourth, leaders who are open and honest about resources and are able to cultivate collaboration to build opportunities for partnership represent the type of leadership exhibited in positive high-performing units.

This study contributes knowledge that demonstrates first—in spite of challenging and changing environments—the creation of a partnership between two separate organizations can be successfully navigated by sharing risks among internal and external stakeholders when both organizations embrace a growth model characterized by personal

and professional development built on optimism for success and excellence. Second, by studying partnerships external to organizations, rather than focusing only on internal relations and unit functioning, policymakers and practitioners can gain a better understanding of effective organizations. Finally, the need to embrace new approaches in organizational leadership is paramount, particularly in a partnership model, where trust building is fundamental to success. This may require leadership both to promote investment in skills development in order to build capacity for long range goals and to cultivate purposeful development of connections needed advance common goals.

Appendices

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction

Examining an Adult Education Unit through a Positive Organizational Lens

Dear Participant,

My name is Lewis Burke, Jr., a doctoral student at the University of Kentucky. As a requirement for a Doctor of Education degree, I am a currently conducting research for my dissertation. My dissertation is a qualitative study titled *Examining an Adult Education Unit through a Positive Organizational Lens.* The purpose of the research is to investigate reasons for exceptional performance of selected units within a community college. I am particularly interested in learning more about how the exceptional functioning of an Adult Education unit is influenced by positive characteristics of the organization's staff and their functioning as an organization. You were selected as a possible participant because of your intricate knowledge of this adult education unit.

This brings me to my question. Would you consider meeting with me so I can ask a few questions and have you complete a survey about the functioning of your adult education unit? This should not take more than one hour and I can send you the questions in advance if you prefer. If you decide to participate, I assure you that all information gathered throughout the study will be kept in the strictest confidence and participants' names or identifying characteristics will not be used in reporting the results of the study.

If you decide to participate, please email me at lewis.burke@kctcs.edu so that I may follow up with the consent form, research purpose and interview questions in addition to scheduling a meeting time. Please know that you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice or penalty.

I thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Lewis Burke, Jr.

Doctoral Candidate, University of Kentucky

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Examining an Adult Education Unit Thorough a Positive Organizational Lens

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about understanding what works well and why in an adult education unit. We hope to learn how high-performing adult education units at community colleges function. You are being invited to take part in this research study because of your intricate knowledge of the adult education program and the institution, and your name came highly recommended from your colleagues as a potential candidate. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 20 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Lewis Burke, Jr. of University of Kentucky Department of Education Policy and Evaluation. He is being guided in this research by Dr. Neal Hutchens. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn how high-performing adult education units at community colleges function. This will be achieved by understanding what works well and why in this adult education unit.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, we will assure you that no participant names or other identifying will be used in reporting the results of the study. Pseudonyms will be used for discussion purposes. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relation with this institution and this adult education unit. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG

WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at Unit of study. You will need to come to the Broadway Building of the Jefferson Community and Technical College at least once for a 45 minute interview. If you are a staff member, you may be interviewed two times during the study. Each of those visits will take about 45 minutes. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 45 minutes if you are a program director or college administrator. These interviews will take place during the Months of May or June. If you are a staff member you will also be asked to complete an electronic questionnaire with open ended questions taking about 45 minutes to complete and a paper questionnaire taking about 15 minutes to complete. The total amount of time a program staff member will be asked to volunteer is 2.5 hours in May or June 2011.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to respond to questions and share your thoughts regarding leadership,

the use of resources, and the performance of the Jefferson Community and Technical

College Adult Education program staff as individuals and the functioning of the program

as a whole. All participants will be asked to participate in the interviews with the

researcher who will ask you to reflect on your perceptions about leadership, resources,

and unit functioning. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

Once the interviews have been transcribed, you will be asked to review the

transcripts to confirm that they reflect your intentions when the interviews were

conducted. The researchers will discuss compile major themes that emerge from your responses.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering. If you decide not to take part in this study, your decision will have no effect on the quality of care, services, etc., you receive. As a student, if you decide not to take part in this study, your choice will have no effect on you academic status or grade in the class.

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except not to take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

We will make every effort to keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. Also, we may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from such organizations as the University of Kentucky and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your being in the study is more risk than benefit to you.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be entitled after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator,Lewis Burke, Jr. at lewis.burke@kctcs.edu or 270-901-1033. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

_____   _____

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____

Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent   Date

Appendix D

Online Questionnaire for Leadership and Resources Perceptions

Examining an Adult Education Unit through a Positive Organizational Lens

This study is focusing on the things that help make organizations successful and why they work. This questionnaire is interested in your views and opinions about what works and why concerning the functioning of your Adult Education unit.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without consequence.

Please respond to the questions as honestly and in as much detail as possible.
This survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

1. What are your position responsibilities in this Adult education unit?

2. What is the relationship between your work and this Adult education unit overall performance?

3. In your Adult education unit, what opportunities do staff members have to learn and grow?

4. In what ways are you empowered to carry out your position responsibilities?

5. What qualities of the formal leaders of your unit make them effective?

6. What qualities of the informal leaders of your unit make them effective?

7. Describe techniques used by leadership to make everyone feel like an integral part of the unit?

8. Give an example of how unit members build upon strengths?

9. Give an example of how unit members value personal assets?

10. How does your unit deliver exceptional value to students?

11. How does the partnership between the Kentucky Community and Technical College System and Jefferson County School District support this Adult Education unit overall performance?

12. Describe a moment or event when you believed this Adult education unit was at its best?

13. Describe how you arrived in your current role at this Adult education unit?

Appendix E

Examining an Adult Education Unit through a Positive Organizational Lens

Individual Interview Guide

Meeting Time _____

Meeting Place _____

Participant Pseudonym _____

This interview will take about 45 minutes of your time. We will use the following questions as a starting point for discussions about the high functioning of this unit. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time without consequence.

Some questions are related to the perceptions and use of resources. For this study, resources are divided into two categories, tangible and intangible. Tangible resources include: positions, finances, facilities, equipment and technology. Intangible resources include: culture, climate, processes, systems, staff capabilities, and tacit knowledge.

Interview questions and sample probes:

1. Tell me about your vision for this unit.

2. Talk about cohesiveness and trust in your unit.

3. How do leaders embrace and reward, risk, and change?

4. What does it mean to you to have stretch goals?

5. What is your understanding of leveraging intangible resources?

6. Discuss the unit priorities of focusing on tangible or intangible resources.

7. In general, how well do the people in your unit embrace change?

8. In what areas are members of your unit willing to try new ways of doing things?

9. Please give examples of how this unit performs beyond expectations?

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Chapter 4

Developing Authentic Leaders for Community Colleges

The role of leaders and leadership has always been, among the most important dimensions of organizational functioning (Amey, 2004). According to Boggs (2003), future community college leaders should project themselves as models of integrity, honesty, and high ethical standards while serving as change agents. But a different direction in leadership finds traits in authentic leaders are similar to characteristics found in previous studies that focused on attributes needed by community college leaders. Although several descriptions of authentic leadership exist in the literature, most authors agree that the basis of authentic leadership is the notion of being true to oneself, acting in accordance with one's own values, and being a leader who is aware of his or her nature (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Liedtka, 2008).

Researchers have identified nine essential traits of effective community college leaders: vision, integrity, confidence, technical knowledge, ability to collaborate, persistence, good judgment, and desire to lead (Hockaday and Puryear, 2000). In addition to all these traits and characteristics, several competencies had been identified for community college leaders coming from the faculty ranks including handling conflict resolution, fundraising, personnel management, administrative and policy issues, and decision making (Foucht, 2010; Romero, 2004). New leaders must be flexible and attuned to the shifting perspectives from authoritarian to servant leadership and similar models (Foucht, 2010). This flexibility is necessary because of the increasing complexity and demands on community college leaders.

In spite of all the suggested leadership characteristics, recent research suggests that current community college leaders were less likely to be prepared in the skill sets embedded in the organizational strategy and resource management domains (Duree, 2007). Authentic leadership can contribute to the development of others, which leads to enhanced organizational performance. Recent studies have suggested that authentic leadership can motive team members to be committed to do work towards the team's goals beyond contractual obligations and thus promote community colleges as premier organizations in which to work (Walumbwa, Luthans, Avey, & Oke, 2011). At the core of authentic leaders is the presence of psychological capital, which enables leaders and all employees to reinforce positive organizational outcomes (Luthans, 2007). Psychological capital is defined as characteristics or traits that embody hope, optimism, persistence, and efficacy.

The Need for New Leadership

Several national and regional studies have predicted an alarming number of retirements in community college leadership (Amey, 2004; Shults, 2001). The aging workforce in America's higher education system has caused concern in replacing middle and senior level administrative positions in community colleges across the nation (Boggs, 2003; Piland & Wolf, 2003). In February 2012, the nation's two main associations the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) representing community college presidents and the Association of Community College Trustees (AACT) representing community college trustees partnered to address the aging of current and future community college CEOs, the shrinking pool of potential presidential candidates, and the high turnover on colleges' governing boards.

Retirements projected will include senior level administrators and college presidents that will significantly impact how community colleges are lead in the next decade. Shults (2001) reported that 45% of 249 community college presidents responding to an AACC survey planned to retire by 2007. The following year, Weisman and Vaughan (2002) reported that 79% of the 661 community college presidents responding to their survey planned to retire in10 years or less. The researchers replicated their study five years later with similar responses from community college presidents regarding their intention to retire: 84% of 545 responding community college presidents planned to retire in 10 years or sooner and that 56% planned to retire in 6 years or sooner (Weisman & Vaughn, 2007).

Although the economic recession and other factors may have delayed many presidential retirements, the partnering of AACC and AACT suggests that the problem of too few potential executive candidates remain. In February 2012, the AACC pledged to support "grow-your-own" leadership programs offered by its member colleges by developing curriculum and offering a toolkit to help community colleges build new leadership programs and enhance existing programs on their campuses and through statewide efforts (Community College Times, 2012).

Choosing Authentic Leadership

I suggest examining the success of authentic leaders in community colleges. This will provide valuable information on how community colleges can develop more authentic leaders who are best suited for current organizational dynamics. I propose that authentic leaders who possess psychological capital traits can effectively contribute to successful organizational functioning in leadership roles at community colleges.

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I endorse the adoption of developing more authentic leaders in community colleges as a bridge to address pending leadership voids across the nation. But it must be noted that this model, like others, has limitations. Chang and Diddams (2009,) argue a limitation and concern in the theoretical development of the authentic leadership framework is expectations for self-reported authentic leaders "to have a level of self-knowledge which may not be attainable" (p.1). In spite of this concern about the extent of self-knowledge among authentic leaders, generally, authentic leaders are aware of how they behave and they care how they are perceived by others (Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011).

Supporting the choice of authentic leadership is a key finding in the examination of a successful adult education unit that contributed to the unit's success. Key to the unit's success is the ability of both informal and formal leaders to develop trust across the unit and with external partners (Burke, 2013). Formal and informal leaders who fail to authentically develop trust among other leaders and followers contribute to the loss of credibility.

Developing Leadership

National level professional development programs such as the Community College Leadership Development Initiative exist to develop some psychological capital tenants such as self-awareness in leaders (Amey, 2004). Many national level programs are oftentimes selective and costly thus narrowing the pool for potential participants (Amey, 2004).

Many community colleges have created campus-based leadership development programs targeting individuals who demonstrate leadership potential within their own

organization (Curtis, Gay, Griffin, Johnson, & Tobia, 2003) and several state-wide community college systems have created leadership training programs to supply a stream of future leaders. For example, the 15 institutions in Massachusetts participate in the Community College Leadership Academy whereby participants receive four graduate credits through the University of Massachusetts-Amherst (Crosson, Douglas, O'Mera, & Sperling, 2005).

In Kentucky, a similar program named the President's Leadership Seminar provides seminar based training where participants explore topics such as leadership traits, national issues and trends, professionalism, media relations, and customer service. At completion, participants receive graduate credits through the University of Kentucky (Kentucky Community and Technical College System, 2012).

Developing Authentic Leadership

These examples of growing-your own programs at the college and state level are relevant to the concept of developing the pool and capacity of authentic leaders. A mass exodus of senior level leaders could cause major setbacks in community colleges because of the lack of preparation programs for middle level managers. These missing programs develop embedded skills needed to lead organizations. The authentic leadership development model would provide additional competency development training on a national level to augment gaps not provided in local programs.

Community colleges can begin the process of developing authentic leaders by offering formal professional development programs at the institutional level to support the preparation of future leaders. The difficulty in developing the authentic leaders needed to fill the pending void in community college leadership lies in the ability of

existing leaders to recognize the importance of developing a succession plan in response to future needs. The investment in such a model could yield significant benefits that would ensure the sustainability of many community colleges across the country.

It cannot be understated that authentic leadership development is an individualized process because becoming an authentic leader is an individual process. I advocate an ideological alternative view to develop authentic leaders by providing many supplemental ways to promote individualized learning. While developing characteristics of authentic leadership in potential leaders can lead to successful organizational functioning, no individual can truly lead authentically without knowing one's true self (Branson, 2007; Harter, 2002).

Recent studies have suggested that authentic leadership can motivate team members to be committed to do work towards the team's goals beyond contractual obligations which can promote community colleges as premier organizations in which to work in (Walumbwa, Luthans, Avey, & Oke, 2011). This type of model builds upon the strengths of community college faculty and staff who traditionally served diverse populations and in some cases with less prestige than their university counterparts.

Amplifying the development of interpersonal competencies through professional development in targeted areas of improvement can build skills sets needed to support the individualized process learning. Leaders possess power, responsibility, and accountability in organizations to invest in themselves and become more aware of their personal authenticity. Organizations can invest in preparing by providing vehicles to support individualized learning and professional development that promotes skill development in specific areas.

Campbell, Syed, and Morris (2010) suggest that through interventions, such as the use of (a) multiple types of communication platforms, (b) competency assessment and improvement, and (c) creation of individualized plans for learning and cohort-based learning, can move leadership development beyond a self-directed process. A proposed series of professional development courses could include the following as a supplement to existing national and local skill development systems:

- Development of Psychological Capital traits in leaders.

- Developing professional development activities and models to support institutional capacity building efforts.

- Developing self-awareness among leaders.

- Identifying effective evaluation tools that measure the effectiveness of authentic leaders.

- Cultivating dynamic team building skills among leader.

- Developing Emotional Intelligence skills among leaders.

Community colleges can begin the process of developing authentic leaders by developing formal professional development programs at the institutional level to support the development of future leaders. The key to developing authentic leaders to fill potentially vacant leadership ranks at community colleges is for existing leaders to acknowledge the importance of developing a succession plan. An opportunity for further research should examine, using a longitudinal design, how authentic leadership in formal and informal leaders is developed with others across units in community colleges. Longitudinal designs can provide an understanding of how authentic leadership capacity development programs can evolve over time.

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation represents part of a collaborative study of successful community college units. In my research, I examined a successful adult education unit from a positive organization lens. The study revealed several aspects of leading and following in organizations, particularly the importance of continuing growth for individuals within an organization. As a community college dean with aspirations of becoming a community college president at the time of conducting this research , this companion dissertation provided me with many opportunities for personal and professional growth that has contributed to further understanding and development of my own leadership style. I appreciated the opportunity to learn from others and the opportunity to question many aspects for organizations.

The University of Kentucky's collaborative study design has provided me with a learning laboratory to explore leading innovative change in community colleges from a scholar-practitioner perspective. This experience without a doubt can be characterized by a combination of resilience, persistence, and creativity that will enable me to help shape the intellectual, spiritual, and civic development of students and peers. From the onset of this dissertation, I anticipated that the study could benefit local community's understanding of effective access to adult education programs and benefits of adult education programs to the region. I also anticipated that the study could provide some benefit to the study's client, the leadership of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System, in gaining some perspective on capacity building across the Commonwealth of Kentucky when they evaluate what works well and why in Adult Education programs. Little did I know or anticipate the profound benefits the study

would have on shaping my own personal and professional growth as an intangible outcome in this process. My individual and group research has underscored the importance of working through the differences in how and when work is done, and appreciating and valuing the contributions of others. In the end, I am encouraged and anticipate many great contributions from my fellow team members in the continued development of community colleges through scholarship and research.

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<p style="text-align:center;">**Vita**</p>

<p style="text-align:center;">**Lewis H. Burke, Jr.**</p>

Educational Institutions Attended and Degrees Awarded

University of Kentucky	Doctoral Candidate, Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation
University of Southern Mississippi	Master of Science, Political Science
University of Southern Mississippi	Bachelors of Science, Political Science

Professional Positions

<u>Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College</u>

2012 to Present	Dean of Workforce Solutions
2001 to 2011	Director of Community, Economic, & Workforce Development

<u>South Central Kentucky Minority Economic Development Council</u>

September 2000 to March 2001	Executive Director

Faculty/Teaching Experience

<u>Western Kentucky University-Bowling Green Community College</u>

2000	Adjunct Faculty Courses: American National Government
1999- 2000	Adjunct Faculty Courses: Introduction to Political Science

Peer-Reviewed Publications

Burke, L. (In Press). Why we can't wait: Diversity planning in the community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice.*

Awards

KCTCS President's Leadership Seminar (Class of 2010)
Thomas Lakin Institute for Mentored Leadership (Class of 2010)
Economic Development Institute, University of Oklahoma (Class of 2007)