2007

Grocery Store Politics: Leading the Rural Community College

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Abstract

Rural community colleges comprise slightly less than one-half of all two-year colleges, making a review of the leaders of these institutions critical—especially in light of predicted leadership shortages impacting community colleges. Rural America is characterized by decreasing populations, increasing poverty, limited economic growth, and limited access to cultural events. The context of the rural environment makes leading colleges in these locations different than in larger, more urban regions. In remote areas, students have different needs, faculty composition involves fewer numbers, and leaders have a unique role, both within the college and the community. The research reported here investigated the experience of rural community college leaders to determine more about the phenomenon of how they constructed their leadership given their rural context. Findings indicate less anonymity for rural community college leaders, a reliance on relationship building to accomplish goals, and a smaller local peer network to aid in reflecting upon the duties of the president. In light of future shortages in campus leaders, rural colleges may want to consider programs that help "grow their own" leaders.

Rural community colleges make up 45% of all two-year colleges and educate one third of all community college students per year (Katsinas & Hardy, 2004). Definitions of rural consist of "a set of identifiers that include the words low, slow and high-low population density, low total populations, low per-capita income, low levels of educational attainment, slow job growth, high poverty, high unemployment, and high rates of illiteracy" (Gillett-Karam, 1995, p. 43). Given the particular context of needs of rural areas, leaders of the community colleges in these regions may face different types of challenges and as a result, construct their conceptions of what it means to be a community college leader different than their suburban and urban counterparts.

Current conversations about leadership at community colleges have involved pending shortages of leaders. A recent report by AACC predicts a turnover for 70% of presidents within the next 10 years (Shults, 2001). With the national demand for community college presidential replacements and the fact that nearly half of all community colleges are rural, the question is how will rural colleges compete in attracting new leaders? Less cultural events, lower pay, and

more isolated regions all create different challenges and resource issues for leaders of rural colleges.

Coupled with the issue of numbers of new leaders required at two-year colleges are expanded conceptions that define leadership itself. Historical theories of leadership evolved from trait theory to behaviorist approaches to the need for transformational leaders (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). More recent approaches to leadership involve the notion of leadership as learning (Amey, 2005; Davis, 2003). These latter perspectives rely on leaders using individuals throughout the organization for leading. Learning as a foundation for leadership also means that leaders are constantly adjusting their actions given feedback they receive.

Given the role rural community college presidents play in the community college system, the call for new leaders, and the rethinking of leadership itself, the question at the heart of this research asked how do rural community college presidents construct their leadership given their rural locales?

Literature Review

Research on college presidents often focuses on leaders of four-year institutions. Attention to community college presidents is not as prevalent and research on rural community college leaders even less evident. Twombly (1995) noted different phases in the history of community colleges and identified contextual influences of each era, particularly noting prevalent leadership theories of the time. The first age relied on leadership theory based on trait theory and the "great man" and corresponded with the founding of the first community colleges [1900-1930s]. The next phase identified by Twombly occurred during the time frame when community colleges were seeking an identity separate from secondary schools [1940s-1950s] and during which funding availability created a huge demand by veterans for postsecondary

education. This period of time corresponded with the behaviorist theories of leadership which placed emphasis on the behaviors of leaders relative to subordinates (i.e., the Ohio State studies and the University of Michigan studies—as cited in Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). The third phase covered the period of expansive growth of community colleges in the 1960s and 1970s. This founding time period created the system and structure of community colleges as we know them today. During this period of expansion, prevalent leadership theory focused on contingency leadership (Fiedler, 1967) and the use of power and influence of leaders and followers (Burns, 1978). The next phase of development [1980s-1995] highlighted an attention to resource issues and brought in leadership models from business with a focus on efficiency and effectiveness. Cultural theories of leadership focused on the influence of the interaction of leaders and followers in socially constructing leadership based on context (Baker & Associates, 1992). Roueche, Baker, and Rose (1989) further examined and categorized exemplary community college leaders using transformational behavioral attributes, noting the role of leaders in changing the beliefs and actions of followers.

It has been a decade since the publication of Twombly's (1995) article and I would argue that a new phase of transition now faces community colleges and their leaders. The latest phase for community college leaders that Twombly did not address might be characterized by a focus on leaders as learners and community colleges in a period of redefinition. The environmental context of this current period requires institutions to be poised to address new challenges and complexities and to alter course to meet changing demands. The demand for more organizational flexibility requires a learning foundation (Amey, 2005) for community college leaders and their institutions.

Senge's (1990) work on the learning organization spotlighted attention on how leaders need to be concerned with personal mastery and how they must aid their organizations in the use

of continuous feedback so the organization learns from its actions. The foundation of Senge's conception of a learning organization builds on the mastery of the five disciplines of systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning. Vaill (1997) builds on the ideal of leaders facilitating team learning when he presented his concept of the "learning premise" (p. 4). Here Vaill argued that leaders are constantly under a barrage of new information, situations, and insights into themselves. Learning occurs, therefore, when leaders are able to see these circumstances in a different light, which may require unlearning old ways of dealing with problems. Davis (2003) emphasized the importance of learning about leadership at multiple levels of the organization. Specifically, Davis discussed how leadership can bubble up through various locations within the organization and how a key role for the positional leader is preparing and mentoring leaders within the institution.

The literature on community college leadership and organizational development indicates the changes in this sector of higher education over time. This background provides the context for the review of the data collected for this research and serves as the foundation from which to determine how these rural leaders constructed their leadership.

Methods

The research reported here is part of a larger study investigating the role of community colleges presidents and organizational change. The sites chosen for investigation for this study were two rural two-year colleges located in the same state. These colleges were selected since the presidents had similar contextual issues regarding state politics and were located only a few hours from one another, thus providing similar geographic and demographic contexts as well.

Site visits were conducted at each of the colleges in 2001. The presidents leading the colleges at that time are still in office. At the time of the visit, both presidents were new on campus.

The two colleges are located in the northeast. Names used in this paper for the colleges and presidents are pseudonyms. Donaldson State College is located in a community of 4,629 people and had a full-time equivalent student population of 2,500 at the time of the study. The town has a small main street, with the college located at the crest of a hill on the edge of the village. President Justine Brooks began as the president in 1999; her previous position was as a vice-president of enrollment at a community college in the mid-west. One-on-one interviews occurred with the president and 14 other campus members. A variety of individuals were interviewed, including members from the leadership cabinet, department chairs, faculty, and support staff.

The second college in the study was Mountain State College. The village in which the college is located had a population of 2,148 and a student population of 3,000 full-time equivalent students at the time of the visit. The small town comes up to the doorway of the college, encompassing the campus within the fold of the community. President Martin Harvey began as president of the college in 1998. He had previously been a president at another two-year college located in the mid-west. A total of 13 campus interviews were conducted, with a similar array of participants as noted above.

The interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. The data were reviewed using hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 1990). The focus of this research design is to understand the essence of the experience, in this case rural leadership, in both a descriptive and interpretive perspective. Of particular interest was a focus on how the presidents constructed their leadership and to what extent their rural locale influenced this identity construction.

Findings

Several key findings were apparent in this research. First, and perhaps predictably, was the lack of anonymity for the presidents in their rural locations. Secondly, given the necessity of cooperation, the presidents relied heavily on various forms of relationships and spent attention on fostering these associations. Their rural location meant that the local peer network available to them was smaller. Finally, the presidents exhibited different ways of leading and were at different points of the leadership development model. Each relied heavily on previous mental maps as they experienced the learning involved in discovering how to lead on their new campuses.

Everyone Knows Your Name

The role of the community college president requires a great deal of interaction with the public. Contact with community members can take the form of public forums, meetings, speeches, or happenstance meetings. In rural locations, the community college president is more likely to be recognizable than in larger suburban and urban areas. In some community college settings the president is required to live in a house designated as the presidential residence, while in others the president may choose their residence.

How an individual chooses where to live can send a message to the campus community. In the case of Justine Brooks, she followed a president who chose to live in a nearby town versus in the college town. She commented:

The previous full time president really did not live here; she wasn't a member of the community. She was a single woman who had a significant other out of the area and

spent a great deal of time and most weekends, most long weekends, out of the area. So

people didn't see her shopping in the village, they didn't see her going to rotary

meetings.

Perceived gender roles for leaders are still prevalent on campuses (Eddy, 2003), with

expectations for women leaders judged on how they uphold traditionally female attributes of

being nurturing, participatory, and collegial in dealing with others (Griffin, 1992; West &

Zimmerman, 1987). The previous woman president was judged for not being connected to the

community in which the college was located. Brooks was conscious of this and chose to live in

the small town of Donaldson. The idea of a physical presence in the community was viewed as

key to Brooks and served to reify that Brooks was a *woman* president. Visibility for women

presidents holds additional dangers if they act outside of prescribed gender expectations.

Brooks quipped, "*You name the group, I've spoken to them,*" as she recollected the

numerous presentations she made to community groups. She was proactive in establishing links

between the college and community members, highlighting her attention to creating connections

via relationship building. Brooks was working within her region to develop a land swap trade

with the city to build wind turbines to supply for the college's electrical needs.

While the choice of living in town was a conscious one on the part of Brooks, it had

another dimension as well. Brooks noted:

On a personal note, there's no anonymity for me in the community. This was something

that I had not been prepared for in any way. It's not that I need to be anonymous, but you

run out in your jeans and sweatshirt to get something for dinner and somebody talks to

you about an issue on campus.

Thus, even though Brooks recognized the importance of being part of the fabric of the community, it had a downside for her in that she did not always have the personal space she craved.

Likewise, President Martin Harvey lived in the community of Mountain Town in which the college was located. While Harvey did not discuss the role of anonymity, he noted the number of occasions he met with people. He said,

> *I prefer face-to-face dialogue to get my message across. Not a planned meeting, just walking around and talking to critically placed faculty and staff.*

Harvey's availability to talk to campus members was noted by many study participants. In particular, Harvey's attendance at sporting events was highlighted. As one department chair said,

> *You know, I can see him at a hockey game or a basketball game and he's friendly, he's outgoing. He's one of those outgoing people. He doesn't avoid people….He's' out there actively seeking to influence.*

For Harvey, he used his lack of anonymity in a purposeful way to influence people and shape opinions. Harvey did not note any issues with loss of anonymity nor did any participants comment that he was ill at ease with interacting with community members or desirous of more solitary time.

Building Relationships

Relationships were a key element for both presidents and took on a variety of forms, ranging from informal to formal. As noted above, presidents in rural locations have a high profile within their communities, which impacts the ways in which relationships are formed. Relationships begin to build during the interview period. The interview serves as a time of first impressions, which are often lasting and telling for campus members in terms of what to expect

from the incoming president. A department chair described Harvey's visit to campus during the interview cycle,

> *He certainly gave the impression that he was here looking at the campus, not here begging for a job at this particular site….He was selling himself, but in a very objective way. Here I am and let's take a look at me and let me take a look at you and let's talk about it.*

Harvey reflected on his interview cycle in a similar manner,

> *I had two other offers on the table at the time, and this was not the most financially attractive, in fact by a long shot, but it felt good….I'm really into technology and computer applications and the like. I came here prepared to do a lot of that. I was up front about that.*

Indeed, Harvey began immediately to put into place a program that utilized laptops in particular curriculums. During his first year on campus, various departments put in requests for selection as pilot programs in which students were required to purchase a laptop.

Brooks also spoke of her initial interview on campus as a period in which both she and campus members were assessing one another.

> *I was told there wasn't time for everyone to introduce themselves and that they all had set questions and would I mind it being videotaped. And away they went. So, I began by saying that I was sorry we didn't have time to introduce one another, but I kind of went around the room and said hello to people and learned a little bit about them. It was just very comfortable….I was in a great position because I didn't really need the job. You know I had a good job and I guess I'm a great believer in the goodness of fit between a presidency and a campus.*

One of the vice presidents on campus was a long time campus leader, having served under multiple presidents. He noted that he was sitting next to the town's public school superintendent during the open forum during Brooks's campus visit. He recalled,

> *At that meeting we [the vice president and school superintendent] were sitting together. He turned to me and, I thought rather loudly, said, "You'd be a damn fool if you didn't hire this lady!" I thought, I agree with you!*

The level of scrutiny the presidents underwent during the interview process gave both the presidents and the campus an opportunity to better know one another and began the stage of forming impressions upon which future relationships were built.

When they arrived on campus, both Harvey and Brooks sought to gain input from their campus members as they made decisions. Harvey's preference for face-to-face exchanges meant that he used opportunities of informal meetings on multiple levels. As one department chair noted of Harvey, "*He may pop an idea on you. I serve on a board with him and I remember one night at the meeting he bent my ear about some campus issue and asked for advice….He's out there actively seeking to influence.*" A campus presence was a critical component in the way in which Harvey worked on relationships. He also supported these face-to-face meetings with e-mail updates that he referred to as "presidential ramblings." Commenting on these e-mail exchanged, the director of public relations said,

> *He's just been floating off e-mails every once in a while. Anytime he's got anything to say you know he'll just tick off a list of things updating the campus on what progress has been made, if any, or if this is a new thing or if this is different than when we last talked, or you know my wife has been visiting her cousin for the last two weeks and I'm having*

trouble cooking—a populism approach. My door's always open, hope you have a great

holiday, that kind of stuff.

The informal manner of these e-mails reinforced the persona of Harvey on campus. One faculty member recounted how during the president's first campus meeting how he began his talk by saying, "*You can call me Martin.*"

Campus members spoke of the fact that they felt their perspective was heard by Harvey and considered in final decision-making. The receptiveness to new ideas was something Harvey noted when he first arrived on campus. Harvey said, "*They were ripe for change. Ripe is my choice of words. They were ready. They were simply looking for someone to say, what should we do? So, there was receptiveness to any idea and a willingness to try things.*" While Harvey thought the campus was willing to listen to his plans, in particular regarding technology, he did observe, "*Just because I had the vision, I couldn't implement it. I needed to do something before that. I needed to develop a consensus.*" Thus, one way in which relationship building was effective was in building a common vision on campus. The size of the campus afforded Harvey a chance to build these relationships with constituents.

Harvey also worked with businesses in the community and as noted above, served on community boards. These boards provide an additional forum to build relationships. Harvey commented, "*The college typically views itself as being apart from the region and I'm trying to build the image within the minds of our faculty and staff that we are the region.*" He saw the college as being a leader in change for economic development.

More formal relationships with campus members and college allies were structured through the leadership team Harvey pulled together. The president noted his initial impressions of upper management, "*I really liked the senior management team a lot. We were very*

compatible and I didn't have to make many changes there." Harvey did not talk, however, about

links with the state's central office, rather he spoke more of the entrepreneurial approach of the

college in building growth locally.

Relationships with students were also important to Harvey. The Dean of Students at

Mountain State noted that he and President Harvey often made trips to the residence halls at odd

hours, including nights. In fact, the president spent the night in the dorms one night. As the dean

recounted,

> *Last year the students were saying "The dorms aren't safe." Well, yeah they are. So we*
>
> *[the president and I] hung out, had pizza. Pizza and wings and hung with the kids and let*
>
> *them ask the real questions. You know, he's pretty good at that.*

The ability to communicate with a wide spectrum of campus constituents was noted by the vice

president of administrative services. Regarding Harvey, the vice president said,

> *He's the sort of guy who could give you a discourse on the history of the industrial*
>
> *revolution, tell you how it's changed society and give you a great speech about it for two*
>
> *hours. And then take a pair of wrenches out of his pocket and rebuild the internal*
>
> *combustion engine. And I've seen him do it with outboard motors for example. So, he*
>
> *runs the entire gambit of theory and practice. He's a fit. If you can't get along with him,*
>
> *there's something wrong with you.*

The skills of getting along with a wide variety of individuals were evident in the relationships

Harvey built.

Like Harvey, Brooks also had mechanisms in place to build relationships with campus

members. When she arrived on campus she instituted presidential coffee sessions to bring

campus members together. Rather than using departments as the convening mechanism, she

brought people together by birthday month or first letter of their last name. In this manner, the groups were diverse. One campus member noted that despite the fact that the campus was small, these coffees provided a way for him to meet people in other areas of the campus that he previously did not know. A new faculty noted, *"I think she made a point of getting to know people and what they did."* Brooks then used the information gathered via these meetings and her work with the leadership team on campus to put together a strategic plan for the campus that she unveiled in January of her first year on campus. While the coffee meetings served as a means to gather information, campus members often referred to the plan as "*her plan*" versus *"our plan."* In public forums, Brooks spoke of the plan as "*my Program of Work,"* and noted how this outlined "*the areas I'm going to pay attention to over the next 18 months."* Campus members did not see the direct links of their contributions to the final strategy developed to guide the campus since Brooks so closely identified the plan as hers without framing for the campus a collective sense of ownership.

Brooks liked to present information in a more formal way to the larger campus community. She noted when she first arrived on campus that a tradition existed in which the president attended an open forum session at which members could ask any question they desired. She said,

> *The one thing I don't particularly care for that has been a tradition here is what has been*
>
> *classified as the forum. Historically the president has stood up in the front of the room*
>
> *and people have asked questions. And, it's not that, I don't have anything to hide. People*
>
> *will tell you I'm pretty open but I feel uncomfortable because I have no idea of what the*
>
> *focus is or what the discussion is. I just feel tense about it and so my own personal feeling*
>
> *would be I don't have any problem with holding these open meetings, but I would like*

them to be more structured. I would like them to not to be a free for all where anyone can

ask the president about anything.

For Brooks, the lack of structure to the meeting format provided less control over the session

than she personally desired. Her preference was to have responses to campus questions, which

she felt she could do with advance notification of the topic in a structured format.

Brooks had a more formal relationship with campus members. She further noted,

I try to get out and walk around. I frighten people when I do that. "What's she here for?

What's she looking for? But I hope the more I do it the more accepted it will be. People

will sometimes talk to me informally when you know they wouldn't set up a time to meet.

Thus, for Brooks, she was most comfortable in more structured interactions with campus

members. Using a more formal style did not necessarily create a lack of information sharing on

campus. One vice president noted, *"She's very open in her communications to the campus. There*

are no secrets." Indeed, like Harvey, Brooks was noted for her ability to communicate with a

variety of people. One of her vice presidents noted, *"Justine could talk with the guy from*

Harvard and she could talk to the person who has no education and is unemployed and they all

would feel very comfortable with her. And they would feel very comfortable with her because she

is sincere."

Brooks was committed to consensus building, in particular with her leadership team. One

vice president remarked,

Her leadership style is she is a consensus builder, everything is done within a team

exercise, we as the cabinet….I can't remember what the issue was, but it was at a cabinet

meeting and I said, "I'm sorry, but I don't agree with you." And that upset her, because I

was the one guy who was outside the circle of the wagon! And she kept saying, "But…."

And I said, "Justine, it's not a problem. I just don't agree with you. I'm not going to fight

you on it." Then she said, "But…." And I said, "I'm not going to argue with you on this.

We just don't agree. And there was no way that I was going to change my position, but

she was you know trying to negotiate with me and it wasn't really necessary.

Here, Brooks was concerned with internal relationships being harmonious. Her desire for

complete support was important to her.

Brooks had a concern for the larger community. She reflected, "*I need to pay attention to*

politics. I need to pay attention to the community…You name the group, I've spoken to them."

Brooks was particularly attentive to building relationships with the central office in the state and

took advantage of the resources the state had to offer. Her perspective was that working on these

relationships would have payoffs for her college. Brooks was invited by the central office

management to take on some leadership positions on state committees. Given these wider system

roles, Brooks felt she could count on these relationships to ask for advice or for support for

campus questions. She thought, *"I think our relationship with the state office is good and that's*

important to Donaldson State. Very important. I have to spend time with the legislature." Brooks

also was working on building relationships with alumni to help in establishing a college

endowment. Thus, Brooks not only attended to relationship building on campus, she reached out

to the larger community, including the state's central offices to build connections that would help

her college. Establishing a repertoire with pivotal community members and comfortableness

within the local culture was key to establishing opportunities for the president.

Both presidents relied on their leadership team for advice and direction. However, they

did not have many peers within their small communities with whom they could share counsel.

Brooks noted her work with the public school superintendent, but for the most part relied on a

larger external network for advice. Harvey did not reference external influences, rather he focused internally within the campus community, particularly drawing advice from his leadership team.

Learning to Lead

The past experiences of both presidents helped guide them as they were learning to lead on their new campuses. Both Harvey and Brooks replicated ideas they had used in their previous positions when they arrived on campus. As noted above, Harvey was committed to using technology when he arrived on campus. Brooks drew from her experience in enrollment management to institute an internal program review process as she restructured the campus hierarchy.

When the presidents were asked what resources they drew upon in aiding them for decision-making on campus, Brooks first noted her reliance on a variety of mentors. She said, *"I think in terms of professional resources, I've got a lot. [The state's central office] will help me, my professional network will help me."* Brooks relied on the relationships she built over time and felt she could turn to this network when she had questions or wanted an opinion on how to approach a particular campus situation. Harvey, on the other hand, noted a reliance on written material. He said, *"I read a lot of periodicals and I try to draw parallels that are transferable."* At this point during the interview, Harvey proceeded to get up and walk to a nearby table that contained a stack of magazines. He flipped through these and pointed out several articles that referred to ways in which other campuses were integrating the use of technology on their campuses.

Each of the presidents also reflected on their own leadership. Harvey stated,

I guess I would classify myself as a visionary. I tend to be more creative, more in that

arena, and if you look at the matrix, I'm probably, as it relates to management, more of a

participatory type of person. Balancing that with, you can't lean too far in that direction

or you will end up in a quagmire and you can't do anything. But you try and figure out

ways to blend the participatory management with a truly autocratic style.

Campus participants also used the term of visionary in describing Harvey. The previous

president was described as a micro-manager, hence, descriptions of Harvey were often made in

comparison to the ways in which he was different from the last president.

While campus members noted the ways in which Harvey allowed for participation, they

also allowed that the manner in which this was accomplished was not necessarily reliant on total

consensus. One department chair noted, *"I've always found him [Harvey] to be what I call a*

great straight shooter because he will tell you why [he has a particular opinion] and say let's

part friends rather than get all hung up on the personalities." Several participants noted that

Harvey allowed for responses from faculty and provided a forum to hear dissenting voices.

Within his leadership cabinet, Harvey was known to press individuals in debates. The

dean of students commented,

In our meetings he'll challenge. And that's the thing. "Why do you think that has to

happen? I don't think that is, but I've got my own opinions—you tell me why." If you've

got a line, if it's logical and if you make your point. Then the point is taken….He truly

takes all of his cabinet members into advisement.

The vice president of academic affairs said,

One of Martin Harvey's significant, as far as I'm concerned, significantly critical

characteristics is he suffers poorly from the company of fools, I mean he's a really nice

guy. He doesn't like to put up with the BS of higher education. I mean there's just an

awful lot of stupid things going on everyday. And I've had presidents who made you

spend time on stupid things, that were just not consistent with the strategic plan, that

didn't make sense….Martin Harvey's great ability to make you feel comfortable to say

"Well, that's a bunch of bologna; that's a waste of time; we're not going to do that." And

conserve your energy and focus for things that are not only consistent with the vision, but

the mission of the institution. That's a great aspect.

Harvey engaged in critical conversations with his leadership cabinet to obtain information that
allowed for him to make informed decisions.

Likewise, Brooks also relied on her cabinet in considering campus changes. Similar
engagement with the leadership team on debates of important issues was present. The vice
president of academic affairs recalled,

She likes to throw out new ideas, likes to get feedback and if she has an idea that she

thinks is really good. If you say no, she'll ask you a million and one questions. So, if she

asks me, should we do X and I say? no, because of this. If she doesn't have a vested

interest, if she doesn't have a real need or wish to do this, then she'll say fine, no

problem. But if she really thinks and sometimes thinks, no a lot of times thinks, no, this is

the right things, she'll say to me, "Well, I hear what you're saying about X, but did you

look at it this way?" We'll go back a half dozen times, a dozen times and sometimes she

will change my mind and sometimes I'll change her mind.

Hence, Brooks uses her leadership team to formulate final ideas and approaches to campus
issues.

When Brooks reflected on what she thought people on campus would say about her leadership she said,

> *Well, I think they will tell you that I'm pretty open and pretty direct….I've had some faculty give me very positive feedback. I think they think I'm working hard….I hope what they would say is that I'm the kind of person that tries to seek a lot of input before making a decision, but I'm willing to make a tough decision. I mean I think of myself as being fairly collegial in terms of inviting input and being willing to discuss anything. But ultimately, I'm the one who has to live with the outcome.*

Brooks saw herself as the final arbitrator of decisions. She made these decisions after input from campus members via her coffee meetings, through dialogue with her leadership team, and sometimes with consultation from her external network.

Discussion

The findings from this research highlight how rural community college presidents have a highly visible role, both within their smaller campuses and outside the college in the larger community. They are often recognized when out on campus and within the community. Brooks, as a first time president, noted with surprise the loss of anonymity her new position brought. In particular, in a small town she was recognized in the grocery store and when she was out learning to golf. These informal meetings were not as comfortable of a forum for exchanges as were the more formal open sessions she could orchestrate on campus. Harvey, on the other hand, relied on his informal meetings as a prime tool for influence on campus. Since Harvey was in his second presidency, the lack of anonymity was not a surprise to him, rather an indication he was further on the leadership development continuum than was Brooks.

Both new presidents worked to develop a strategic plan and vision for the campus during their first year. Harvey relied on consensus building to formulate the plan for his campus. He brought into the plan an infusion of ideas regarding technology that emanated from his past experiences. Brooks also used campus participation to develop the campus strategic plan, but this plan was often referenced as "Her plan of work" rather than "Our plan of work." Campus members did not see how their participation in the smaller group conversations translated into the campus wide document or vision.

The vignettes related in the findings section highlight how each president had a unique approach to their leadership. What was common was that relations of various kinds and intensities, were critical to campus success. In particular, the relationships to the community allowed for advancement of the college mission. Given the small size of the towns in which the colleges were located, college employees made up a large number of the residents. As such, both the presidents and the campus members had multiple roles within the community infrastructure.

Harvey acted as an inclusive leader and worked to facilitate change through connecting ideas gleaned from business and applying them to situations on campus. He worked closely with the leadership team to allow for the testing of innovative ideas. Part of his strategy involved the mini-dairy on campus which operated as a regional business and also supplied all the dairy products for the cafeteria. Comments of members of the leadership team and faculty participants indicated that their perspectives were sought and their opinions used to formulate campus plans. A diversity of perspectives was sought as Harvey informally talked with various campus members on his walks around campus and during sporting events. The process of the development of the campus strategic plan allowed for the development of shared values. Individuals were free to express their viewpoints and allowed a forum for dissenting views.

Harvey specifically noted the need to develop a broad based consensus around the ideas within the campus plan.

Even though Harvey was inclusive in his leadership, he still noted his position as the final arbitrator and positional leader. For instance, members had some level of participation in decision-making, but a true collective leadership environment was not present. As Harvey noted, he was not completely participatory since "y*ou can't lean too far in that direction or you will end up in a quagmire and you can't do anything."* Thus, while contributions were welcome from campus members, true collective leadership was not present.

Harvey did help campus members make sense of campus issues by first coming to an understanding for himself and then communicating out to the college a particular viewpoint. For instance, Harvey said, *"Part of the change I didn't dwell on, at no point did I dwell on the negatives or even really talk about them much."* Instead, Harvey framed for the campus a perspective that was forward moving and concentrated attention on the positive changes involving the infusion of technology on the campus.

As a learner, Harvey tried out his ideas on various campus members and went so far as to engage them in debate. This process allowed him to begin to question the assumptions he brought to the issues and to see other perspectives. Critical to organizational learning and personal mastery is the questioning of individual underlying mental models. While Harvey indicated he was intentional in his focus on technology to guide campus vision, he was receptive to thinking about the variety of ways in which this might be accomplished.

Brooks relied on directed leadership. She reorganized the reporting structure of the college shortly after her arrival and instituted another layer in the hierarchy by creating positions for deans. She relied on the hierarchy and formal campus forums to interact with campus

members. As illustrated above, she used her leadership team as a prime source for debate and discourse. It was not always evident to campus members their level of influence on the larger campus plans, as indicated by participants' reference to the plan as "Her plan" versus "Our plan." This environment was more leader-centered and one in which campus members waited for directions. The institution of the campus review process provides an example of how a plan came from the president and was instituted campus wide.

Brooks did utilize some elements of participatory leadership, however. Her work with the campus members within the coffee sessions was a step toward being inclusive in gathering information. Likewise, she used her leadership team in an intentional way to gather input. What was not always evident for campus members, however, was how their perspectives were enacted in the final documents. Brooks was also working on developing community on campus. She noted that the campus was split between longer serving faculty and an influx of new faculty. To help in building community, Brooks instituted a holiday party to celebrate campus accomplishments. The beginning development of a shared sense of ownership begins to move leadership development into more developed phases of facilitation and inclusiveness.

For both Harvey and Brooks, their leadership evolved over time and changed depending on contextual elements and demands. The fact that this is the first presidency for Brooks means that she is still learning what works for her as a president and what doesn't. Harvey's past experience as a college president allowed him a broader range of experiences to draw upon and practice with understanding the strategies and phases of change. What is important for both of these presidents is how their value of learning extended to the organizations as well. Enacting organizational learning on a campus allows for leaders to move into greater levels of leadership development, ultimately creating a campus environment that builds on leadership throughout the

institution. Leadership throughout the college allows for greater flexibility in addressing campus issues, particularly for small rural community colleges. Relationship building by the president is critical in fostering this level of shared leadership.

Conclusion

Resource issues continue to press community colleges into taking responsive actions. College leaders, in turn, are called upon to lead changing, and increasingly more complex, two-year institutions to meet a host of educational, community, and economic demands. Coupled with these issues are personnel shifts—both in the leadership ranks and in faculty. The relationships rural community college presidents foster are critical in making successful transitions for their organizations and in aiding rural communities in sustaining economic viability. This research highlights how critical both internal and external relationships are to achieving goals. Further, as leaders become more seasoned in their positions, they become more adept at fostering relationships that aid their institutions.

The particular demands of rural living require a fit between the community college president, the college, and the region. New rural leaders, in particular, must be prepared for a loss of anonymity and be cognizant of the visible role they have in the community. While it is true that all presidents symbolically represent their institutions when they are off campus, living in rural areas allows for fewer opportunities in which one is not recognizable. Leading a rural community college truly lives out the cliché of being a big fish in a small pond. Attendant with the ability to impact meaningful change that impacts large percentages of the community population is the issue of being under public scrutiny to perform.

An ability to relate to a broad spectrum of constituents is important for rural leaders. The skill of bringing partners together to solve community problems is also important. Accordingly,

successful rural leaders need to communicate with a public that may range from the illiterate poor to the educators working in their college and the professionals in the community to state policy makers. The politics of the college often play out in the grocery store. Tuition increases impact students working in community businesses, local millages impact the poor populations, and college programming decisions impact both personnel and ultimately the economics of the rural towns and villages.

It is often difficult to recruit leaders to rural and remote locations. As demands for new leaders become more significant, developing local leadership development programs might be a response. Homegrown leaders understand the community and the issues. They have developed long standing relationships which can aid in leveraging partnerships to tackle community issues. A drawback of these programs, however, is the need to approach issues from fresh perspectives. Old mental maps are hard to alter without a conscious effort to recognize ingrained approaches and assumptions regarding long standing problems.

Finally, as leaders move toward more participatory forms of leadership, new requirements and demands are expected of campus members. No longer can campus faculty and staff be passive in their roles on campus, waiting for directions from a single leader. Instead, leadership throughout the college requires everyone to take on responsibility for strategic outcomes and advancement of the college mission. Leaders of learning oriented colleges must also be open to self-reflection and continuous learning. The work of collective leadership, joint decision-making, and broad based participation is hard work on the part of both leaders and the followers. In this case, leaders must be prepared for allowing time for change and trusting that shared leadership is an effective option.

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