

DISSERTATION

BOARD MEMBER PERCEPTIONS OF BOARD EFFECTIVENESS IN PUBLIC
COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

BOARD MEMBER PERCEPTIONS OF BOARD EFFECTIVENESS IN PUBLIC COMMUNITY COLLEGES: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Many organizations have a governing board in place to assist in monitoring high level policy decisions and establishing organizational direction and goals. Studies have examined board members of different types of higher education institutions; however, the perceptions of public community college board members related to board effectiveness has not been studied. The current qualitative study, drawing upon Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), addresses this gap in the literature by researching the lived experiences of seven public community college board members with two or more years of service related to board effectiveness in one western state.

The findings resulted in four superordinate themes: personal development and engagement, board engagement, college commitment and engagement, and community engagement. Board effectiveness is demonstrated when board members are personally committed to fostering an environment that promotes and values board member development through participation in orientation program and ongoing board education. Board member development also promotes an understanding of the board's role and works to alleviate unhealthy personal or political agendas an individual may bring with them to the board.

Participants highlighted the importance of building relationships with other board members and the CEO. By working together as a team, the board and CEO can focus on the college's mission and establishing the future direction for the college. Board effectiveness is also demonstrated through being involved in college activities and events and by ensuring the college is establishing board policies that ensure consistency in the board's operations for planning and decision making purposes. Community colleges have more of a local focus as compared to other organizations where effectiveness studies have been conducted.

The findings of the current study deviated from previous board effectiveness studies independent, private colleges in the importance of the CEO's relationship with the board. The findings also diverged from the studies on public university board effectiveness related to community connections, with community colleges having a need for more of a local focus versus public universities needing to build stronger connection with state government. Effective community college boards embrace their responsibility to represent the community's interests in the college and to strengthening relationships with the public they serve.

A common term throughout the findings of the current study is "engagement" with an emphasis on being actively involved in all aspects of boardsmanship. Effective board members are engaged in being oriented, educated, and developed as a board member, in working together as a team and with the CEO, in establishing and maintaining the college's mission and future direction, and in connecting with the communities and citizens served.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“A community college exists so that the world in which it operates can be a better place.”

(Carver & Mayhew, 1994, p. 17)

Community colleges are an integral part of postsecondary education in the United States. They provide accessible, affordable higher education opportunities for many who would otherwise not be able to pursue educational goals (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Killacky & Valadez, 1995; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Miller & Deggs, 2012; Vaughan, 2007). In addition, community colleges enhance the quality of life for the communities they serve by providing students access to academic transfer courses in preparation for a baccalaureate degree, offering students training and/or certifications for vocations that benefit industries in the college’s service area, or allowing students to further personal learning interests and pursue lifelong learning of community citizenry (Carver & Mayhew, 1994).

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2014), 87% of the 1,132 community college member institutions are public, funded in part by local and state tax dollars. With tax support, comes oversight responsibility by way of a governing board of trustees. The lay person boards of public community colleges are made up of appointed or elected officials. These individuals have the responsibility of serving as the liaison between the owners or citizenry and the institution to ensure the organization’s mission and vision are aligned with the needs of the community (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1993; Kezar, 2006; Potter & Phelan, 2008; Schuetz, 2008; Smith, 2000; Taylor, Chait, & Holland, 1991).

The effectiveness of an organization's governing board impacts the overall organizational performance (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Chait et al., 1993; Holland, 2002; Holland, Chait, & Taylor, 1989; Holland & Jackson, 1998; Jackson & Holland, 1998; Kezar, 2006; McDonagh, 2006). For example, community college governing boards have the opportunity and responsibility to establish the direction of the college through the mission, vision, and values of the organization as well as to ensure the college is moving in a strategic direction (Alfred, 1998; Amey, Jessup-Anger, & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Davis, 2001). Governing boards also determine high level policies that impact the way the board operates, how the board interacts with the CEO, and the processes used for connecting with key stakeholders (Carver & Mayhew, 1994).

Holland et al. (1989) explored board effectiveness by identifying dimensions related to board effectiveness. Additional studies and scholarly works emerged from this empirical work by examining board effectiveness of independent colleges and other nonprofit organizations (Chait et al., 1993; Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1996; Taylor et al., 1991). Kezar (2006) conducted a study of board performance and effectiveness of public liberal arts colleges and universities using the Holland et al. (1989) results along with studies of corporate board effectiveness. The researcher's review of the literature found works related to the board effectiveness of independent, private colleges and public liberal arts colleges; however, studies related to board effectiveness in public community college boards were absent from the literature. The current study addresses this gap in the literature.

Board Effectiveness

The following definition of board effectiveness serves as a synthesis of definitions provided in the works of several researchers and authors focusing work on the topic. This definition served as the foundation for the current study:

Board effectiveness occurs when a highly cohesive board is focused on fulfilling the mission, vision, and goals of the college and ensuring those attributes are in line with the needs of the communities served by the institution (Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Holland et al., 1989; Holland & Jackson, 1998; Kezar, 2006; Smith, 2000).

Multiple studies and theoretical pieces have addressed and suggested that board effectiveness is enhanced through board development activities and clearly defined expectations of board member roles and responsibilities (Amey et al., 2008; Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Davis, 1997, 2001; Holland et al., 1989; Holland & Jackson, 1998; Ingram, 1997; Smith, 2000; Taylor et al., 1991). Many of the authors cited here were part of an empirical study conducted on board effectiveness in private, independent colleges in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Kezar (2006) identified a gap in the literature related to the study of board effectiveness in public higher education.

Community colleges comprise a substantial sector of higher education enrollment, accounting for nearly half of undergraduate enrollment according to an AACC Fact Sheet (2014), community colleges have a responsibility to deliver quality educational programming for students seeking to transfer to a university or move directly into the workforce through vocational training. Chait et al. (1993), Carver and Mayhew (1994), and Davis (1997) agreed that governing boards have significant influence on the success of their organizations through the development and implementation of the college's mission, vision, and values. Board members impact organizational effectiveness by establishing a strategic direction and focusing the college's resources in support of priorities that further the organizational mission. Studies have focused on board effectiveness and how board effectiveness is demonstrated through competencies (Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Holland et al., 1989).

Board Responsibilities

Most public, lay person board members do not have a background in community college leadership, administration, or governance, and many do not have experience leading in other types of educational environments, such as public school districts or university systems (Chait et al., 1993; Davis, 2001; Holland & Jackson, 1998; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Taylor et al., 1991; Taylor, Chait, & Holland, 1996). As a result of little prior experience with community college governance and in the absence of effective orientation and ongoing development programs, individual board members are likely to promote personal interests over the ideas of those who elected or appointed them (Chait et al., 1993; Davis, 1997). In order to achieve success as a governing board, one of the main responsibilities of individual board members is to understand the culture of the organization and focus on the organization's mission, vision, and goals (Chait et al., 1993; Chait et al., 1996, Kezar, 2006).

Successful colleges are best served by engaged board members with an interest in putting the college and its educational mission first (Chait et al., 1996; Davis, 1997, 2001; Holland & Jackson, 1998; Ingram, 1997; Kezar, 2006; Taylor et al., 1991). The effectiveness of a governing board hinges upon each board member's contributions and willingness to focus on the organization as a whole (Chait et al., 1993; Holland et al., 1989; Taylor et al., 1991). When board members focus on special interests, which may have been part of their original motivation in serving, board effectiveness is diminished (Chait et al. 1993; Taylor et al., 1991). In order for board members to understand the scope of the community college they were elected or appointed to serve, they need to be oriented to the mission, vision, values, and culture of their respective institution and to the overarching role of community colleges in American higher education in

general (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Holland et al., 1989; Kezar, 2006; Taylor et al., 1991).

Carver and Mayhew (1994) promoted a philosophy of board members having the responsibility of working collectively and cohesively together. Throughout the literature, the importance of a cohesive, informed group of board members and the connection to board effectiveness was substantiated across multiple studies (Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Holland et al., 1989; Kezar, 2006; Taylor et al., 1991). Ongoing development has been shown to be an important part of building a cohesive team of board members and ensuring the governing board fulfills its responsibilities. When board members are working from a consistent base of knowledge and share a common foundation about community college issues in general and specifically, they are better prepared to serve their respective college (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Holland et al., 1989; Kezar, 2006; Smith, 2000).

Board members are tasked with holding the public's interests in mind as they provide policy development and direction to meet the needs of local constituencies (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Kezar, 2006). When board members assume responsibility for their respective community college district, they need to be prepared to meet the governance obligations of these comprehensive organizations (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Davis, 2001). Board development, cohesiveness, and being well informed are but a few of the board effectiveness attributes that will be explored further in the current study.

Board Competencies

Holland et al. (1989) conducted a grounded theory study that resulted in the identification of competencies differentiating effective boards from less effective boards. The level of effectiveness of the participating boards was based on the perceptions of an external group of

national experts invited to share the names of effective and ineffective boards without sharing which category the board was a part. The data collection and analysis methods of this study are described in detail in Chapter Two.

From this study, Holland et al. (1989) identified competencies described in the six dimensions of board effectiveness. The competencies were further refined in works by Chait et al. (1993, 1996) and Taylor et al. (1991) and are represented in the six dimensions of effective board performance summarized as follows:

Contextual dimension refers to the board's understanding and ability to take into account the culture, norms, and values of the organization it governs.

Educational dimension means the board takes the necessary steps to ensure that members are well informed about the organization and the professionals working there, as well as the board's own roles, responsibilities, and performance.

Interpersonal dimension includes the board's efforts to nurture the development of its members as a group, attend to the board's collective welfare, and foster a sense of cohesiveness.

Analytical dimension was originally labeled the intellectual dimension but always referred to the board's recognition of the complexities and subtleties in the issues it faces, and its ability to draw on multiple perspectives to dissect complex problems and synthesize appropriate responses.

Political dimension means the board accepts as one of its primary responsibilities the need to develop and maintain healthy relationships among key constituencies.

Strategic dimension denotes the board's ability to envision and shape the institution's direction and ensure a strategic approach is used in preparation for the organization's future.

The competencies described in the six dimensions of board effectiveness (Holland et al., 1989) provided the framework from which the current study of board effectiveness in the public community college evolved. The current study interview protocol was further influenced by the works of the many pieces of literature reviewed on the topics of community colleges, governance, and board effectiveness described in Chapter Two.

Purpose of Study and Research Question

Prior research on board effectiveness focused primarily on independent colleges, public universities, and other nonprofit organizations versus public community colleges. However, the purpose of the current study is to investigate board effectiveness in a public community college environment through the lived experiences of board members. In order to understand the topic of board effectiveness from a community college perspective, the research question guiding the current study is: What are the lived experiences of public community college board members who have served at least two years as they relate to board effectiveness?

Significance of the Study

The leadership the board provides to an organization by establishing policies, setting the mission and vision, hiring a president, and connecting with the community puts the college on a path of success when the board operates effectively (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Holland et al., 1989; Kezar, 2006; Smith, 2000). To that end, the current study examined the lived experiences of public community college board members who have served at least two years related to board effectiveness as earlier defined. Prior studies have focused on private, independent colleges, public universities, and other nonprofit boards. The current study adds to the body of research by addressing the gap in the research on board effectiveness related to public community colleges.

Delimitations

Delimitations are factors that the researcher has control over and describe what will be and will not be part of the study (Roberts, 2010). The current study focused on the population of public community college board members who had served at least two years. This delimitation was made because board members need time to learn and understand their role. The researcher perceived that two years of board services would provide a basis from which participants would have adequate related experiences needed in order to provide insight into board member lived experiences with regard to board effectiveness.

The research study was further delimited by focusing participant selection on current board members of public community colleges in one western state. The primary reason for focusing the project on this geographic area was the travel and time restrictions of the researcher.

Limitations

Limitations exist in most studies and represent those facets that the researcher has little or no control (Roberts, 2010). The participants were nominated by their respective CEO and/or self-selected based on an interest in participating in the study. They also met the criteria of having served at least two years on the governing board. A limitation existed in that participant responses were based on each participant's own understanding and definition of what constitutes board effectiveness.

Researcher's Perspective

The researcher is a community college administrator serving as the vice president for human resources at a public community college. She has worked at three public community colleges over the past 25 years primarily in the areas of human resources and finance with some experience in student services and instruction. Throughout this experience, the researcher has worked with a variety of boards.

The researcher's perception is that the boards have demonstrated varying levels of board effectiveness. Boards have been on both ends of a cohesive spectrum. Some boards worked well together, seeming to enjoy working together and managing to work through differences of opinion on complex issues in a respectful manner. At the other end of the spectrum, boards had members who, regardless of the issue, were in opposition to the rest of the board. One particular board dynamic had two such board members that seemed to have a goal of undermining the CEO and other board members. This was demonstrated by not participating in discussions regarding topics presented for board action and then voting no on the motion, leaving the board and CEO wondering why. The lack of transparency and open communication by board members negatively impacts the cohesiveness of the board and has an adverse impact on board effectiveness.

Summary

Board members play an important role in setting the mission and direction for a community college. As they perform their governing responsibilities, board members need to understand their responsibilities and ways in which they can serve their community college effectively. There is a gap in the literature looking at board effectiveness of community college boards. This chapter focused on providing a framework of board effectiveness for the current study, the research question, and the significance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to more fully understand the scope of the current study, the researcher reviewed related literature with a focus on community college history and demographics, governance approaches, and board effectiveness. While literature on these topics is expansive, a focus has been on those articles and studies that are most relevant to the research question: What are the lived experiences of public community college board members who have served at least two years as they relate to board effectiveness?

Community Colleges

Community colleges were founded upon the philosophy of providing accessible and affordable postsecondary education (Bricker, 2008; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Haffron Bers, 1980; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Plinske & Packard, 2010) to the masses. Underlying the initiatives to create two year colleges was a focus to serve as an integral part of economic and cultural development for the areas served. To achieve stakeholder expectations, community colleges must be governed and managed well (Amey et al., 2008; Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Davis, 2001; Holland et al., 1989; Vaughan & Weisman, 1997a).

Community colleges came from the increased need for accessible postsecondary education as the country became more industrialized in the early 1900s (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Mellow & Heelan, 2008) and from the need to provide high quality services in an efficient, affordable manner (Bricker, 2008; Vaughan, 2006). Joliet Junior College was the first public community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Founded in 1901, it was created to allow students to remain closer to home but still gain access to higher education and fulfill the requirements of the first two years of a baccalaureate degree. In some instances, community colleges were also considered extensions of secondary education, to relieve the

burden on four-year college enrollment increases and to create vocational programs for students to learn a trade or some other form of workforce development (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Community colleges grew from one in 1901 to more than 1,100 in 2014, with a significant increase occurring in the 1960s when the number of colleges more than doubled (Vaughan, 2006). There were 412 community colleges in 1960 and 909 in 1970 (Vaughan, 2006), an increase of 121%. According to the AACC's 2014 "Fast Facts," there are now 1,132 community colleges in the United States. Nearly half of all undergraduates attend community colleges with more than 12 million students enrolled according to 2012 enrollment figures (AACC, 2014). The average age of the community college student is 28 and 57% of enrolled students are female (AACC, 2014). Community colleges offer an affordable option for postsecondary education, with tuition averaging \$3,260 per year for a public, in district community college as compared to in state tuition at a four year public college, which averages \$8,890 per year (AACC, 2014).

In addition to taking on the role in educating the nation's citizens, community college programs have evolved over time. Providing high quality transfer education and traditional vocational certificates remains a core responsibility; however innovative programs have become more prevalent in these flexible, responsive organizations (Duderstadt, 2000; Friedel, 2008). In order to sustain this proactive approach, colleges must be governed efficiently and effectively (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Chait et al., 1993; Davis, 2001), which leads to a review of governance in community colleges.

Governance

Governance is defined as "the structure and process of decision making a college uses to address internal and external issues" (Amey et al., 2008, p. 5). Successful governance is represented by consistency and cohesiveness in making, following, and enforcing policies and

processes in support of the organization's mission (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Chait et al., 1993; 1996).

Levin (2008) defined governance as a system of regulations and a pattern of behaviors that lead the decision making process within an institution. Governance extends beyond the internal processes of an organization to the other entities with which the institution interacts, such as other colleges, businesses, government agencies, and the public (Levin, 2008). Research also suggested that governance shapes and molds an organization, reflecting the institution's identity and values (Levin, 2008).

Miller and Miles (2008) defined governance as a process of decision making within the college and stated that legal authority is usually granted to the governing board by a governmental entity. The authors further stated, that in a community college shared governance among all constituencies, including the governing board, administration, and faculty, is a valuable approach to successfully leading the institution. By shared governance, Miller and Miles (2008) encouraged a process of data gathering from impacted constituencies and a consensus building approach to decision making.

The primary stakeholders for community colleges are the citizens of the communities served by the college, and the communities are represented in community college governance through the selection of board members via election or appointment (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Community college governance is fashioned by structure and process intended to control policy, implement decisions, and allocate resources (Alfred, 2008; Amey et al., 2008; Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Miller, 2002; Schuetz, 2008). A governing board's primary responsibility is to serve as a liaison between the college and the community through the establishment of the

college mission and policies that ultimately reflect the needs of the community (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Holland, 2002; Smith, 2000).

The following sections provide more detail of the responsibilities and development of governance. In addition, two primary models of governance are discussed. The first model is based on an approval approach and the second model is referred to as policy governance, which is used by many community colleges.

Responsibilities and Development

Community college governance is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal forces include faculty and administration; external forces include entities on the local, state, federal, and global level (Smith, 2000). Additionally, Amey et al. (2008) identified K-12 student preparation, articulation agreements with other academic institutions, community needs, and business and industry links as specific examples of local, state, and federal factors that influence community college governance. There are many factors that must be considered when serving in a leadership role in a community college, resulting in the need for a robust orientation and development program to bring and keep board members abreast of issues related to their institutions (Davis, 2001). The need for effective governance in the community college is important and requires thoughtful deliberation in the decision making process to influence positive outcomes (Smith, 2000).

Amey et al. (2008) stated a team based approach to institutional governance increases the quality and creativity of problem solving and decision making for community colleges. This approach lends itself to consensus building and involvement from various stakeholders in the decision making process, which is a hallmark of shared governance present on many college campuses. There must be a partnership among governing boards, administration, and the faculty

to ensure the success of colleges and students (Davis, 2001). Partnerships between colleges and other service area entities also contribute to meeting the needs of business, industry, and local government agencies (Amey et al., 2008).

Approval Model

Historically, boards have operated under a model similar to the K-12 system, which is described as an approval model. This practice lent itself to board members spending most of their meeting time involved in considering many operational and day-to-day administrative decisions for approval, particularly those dealing with financial matters (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Miller, 2002; Potter & Phelan, 2008).

Many two year colleges started as departments within public school districts resulting in a governing practice similar to the public schools districts that oversaw them. After these colleges transitioned from extensions of secondary education to community colleges, legislative acts recognized them as separate entities, allowing community colleges to have their own governing boards. Elected and appointed officials serving community colleges brought the school district's philosophy of governance with them, which resulted in community colleges continuing to mimic the public school approval based model of governance (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Potter & Phelan, 2008; Schuetz, 2008). Community colleges have moved away from the approval model of governance in favor of the policy governance model or some combination of the two (Mellow & Heelan, 2008).

Policy Governance Model

The Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT), a national trustee's organization, worked with theorists and researchers in the 1980s and 1990s to develop a theory of community college governance (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). From the works of Potter (1979)

and further developed by Carver and Mayhew (1994), the model of policy governance was introduced and promoted by ACCT. According to ACCT (2005), community college boards have implemented “some, if not all, elements of the model into their governance culture” (p. 2).

The policy governance model challenged boards to introduce more effective governance principles that focused on adding meaningful leadership by way of the establishment of a clear mission, creation of a vision, and setting strategic directions for the college (Potter & Phelan, 2008). Policy governance involves the board focusing on the mission, vision, and outcomes or ends of the organization and the means of achieving the ends, or goals of the college, are left to the president, faculty, and staff of the college (Carver & Mayhew, 1994).

Policy governance was built on the principles of creating institutional goals and focusing on the future as set out in mission, vision, and values of the organization. Carver and Mayhew (1994) postulated that the governing board is tasked with setting the direction for the college by making decisions related to where the college will be, where anticipated funding resources will come from, and what the demographics of the college will look like in the future. Administration and staff are responsible for measuring outcomes, and the board is responsible for monitoring the organization’s effectiveness in reaching its goals (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Potter & Phelan, 2008).

Policy governance principles also require the establishment of policies that represent the priorities of the board and determine limitations on the president’s actions (Alfred, 2008; Carver & Mayhew, 1994). An example of items the board may reserve for itself are the buying and selling of real estate and hiring of the president (Carver & Mayhew, 1994). Governing authority resides with the board as a whole, not with an individual board member (Smith, 2000). Once a

decision has been reached on an issue, the entire board should commit to support the decision (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Smith, 2000).

When operating under a policy governance model, the only employee reporting to the board is the president. Carver and Mayhew (1994) stated that an effective board works issues and initiatives through the president and does not circumvent the president by delegating tasks to other college employees. Finally, the board's highest priority should be on student learning and student success; however, most boards find themselves focusing at least half of their time on issues involving finances (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Potter & Phelan, 2008).

Board members should spend time focusing on the future of the college and helping it to build the tools necessary for a successful future (Smith, 2000). Providing strong and strategic policy based leadership will further the college's mission, vision, and goals and ensure success for the community and the students served (Alfred, 2008; Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Smith, 2000). The governing board retains the ultimate responsibility in establishing the direction for the community college, its ultimate responsibility, through policy development (Alfred, 2008; Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Miller & Miles, 2008).

The synthesis of the literature related to governance explored the connection between community colleges' mission and organizational success and how governance influences institutional effectiveness. Governing boards of public community colleges have significant responsibilities related to the college fulfilling the needs of the communities served. The governance approaches used have evolved over time, moving from an internal, management based approval model to a more externally focused policy governance model that strives to ensure the long term success of the college. The importance of governance is further affected by governing board effectiveness, which will be explored in the next section of this chapter.

Board Effectiveness

There are several studies related to governance, board effectiveness, and organizational success (Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Holland et al., 1989; Kezar, 2006; Taylor et al., 1991). The studies demonstrate that as governing boards come together as a cohesive team, board performance improves (Holland et al., 1989; Holland & Jackson, 1998; Kezar, 2006; Taylor et al., 1991).

Board Effectiveness in Independent, Private Colleges

In their study conducted on board effectiveness, Holland et al. (1989) identified competencies to strive for as described within six dimensions of board effectiveness. Using both a deductive approach to examine board effectiveness literature and an inductive analysis of the experiences of board members of independent, private colleges, the researchers used a grounded theory study to guide them in establishing parameters of board effectiveness.

The study involved a thorough review of literature and a series of interviews with board chairs, board members, and presidents from 10 independent, private colleges (Holland et al., 1989). The research team asked a group of national experts to select colleges with a perceived reputation of effectiveness or ineffectiveness related to board performance. The research team received the names of the colleges but they were not informed as to whether the boards fit into the effective or ineffective category by the national experts.

The research team employed a critical incident technique to guide the interview process with multiple participants from each college. Through a series of interviews, the results of the mini case studies served to describe the six dimensions of board effectiveness (Holland et al., 1989). Researchers reviewed transcripts of interviews independently and then exchanged them, adding credibility to the research through a multi-investigator review method. Using a grounded theory approach in the initial phase of the study on board effectiveness in independent, private

colleges, Holland et al. (1989), inductively analyzed interview data, coding for themes and categories demonstrating effectiveness competencies. The team then assimilated results between raters and compared findings. They also reviewed related literature through a deductive process, ultimately resulting in the establishment of the six dimensions of board effectiveness shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Dimensions of Board Effectiveness

Six Dimensions of Board Effectiveness	
Contextual	Educational
Interpersonal	Analytical
Political	Strategic

These findings were validated using quantitative methods in phase two of the study and then compared to the initial group of national experts’ list of effective versus ineffective boards. The researchers went on to compare the outcomes with the core performance indicators, including financial reserves, net student revenues, institutional wealth, and academic emphasis (Holland et al., 1989). The data from this study were further reviewed and used in studies conducted by Chait et al. (1993, 1996) and Taylor et al. (1991).

Board Effectiveness in Public Higher Education

An additional study on board effectiveness was conducted by Kezar (2006), focusing on public higher education boards and their performance as compared to other types of boards. In preparation for her study, Kezar based the need for research into public higher education boards on the gap identified in the existing literature related to board effectiveness and prior studies focused on private colleges, nonprofits, and corporate boards. Public higher education boards

offer a different dynamic that must be considered when evaluating effectiveness based on the political nature of elections or appointments.

Kezar (2006) framed her study with two research questions focused on the elements of high performance/effectiveness among public higher education boards and compared the performance of governing boards in public higher education with the effectiveness of boards in private colleges, nonprofit organizations, and corporations. The study was informed by a review of the work Holland et al. (1989) and Carver and Mayhew (1994). Additional literature and resources from the corporate and nonprofit domain were also reviewed by Kezar (2006) because of the limitations found related to the topic of board effectiveness in higher education. As Kezar (2006) began her research, she identified three factors that affect board performance. These included “(a) effectiveness is careful execution of certain processes according to a set of principles; (b) effectiveness is meeting a specific outcome; and, (c) effectiveness is a combination of following a set of process principles and achieving specific outcomes” (p. 971).

Using a phenomenological approach, Kezar (2006) involved a research team of three to conduct elite interviews with 132 identified experts. The participants were individuals who had served on multiple higher education boards, board consultants, and national higher education board association leaders. An elite interview approach was selected because “these interviews tend to be more open-ended ... so that the interviewee can stress their definition of, structure, and relevant data related to a situation” (p. 978). The interviews were focused on assessing perspectives of experts with an in-depth knowledge of board performance and ideas on how to improve board performance.

Based on the size of Kezar’s (2006) sample and the geographic distribution of participants, phone interviews were conducted. The initial findings from the elite interviews were

reviewed by focus groups made up of presidents, board members, and state officials that were not part of the initial group interviewed “to see if the results resonated with their experience as a member check on the results” (p. 980). A thematic coding process using both deductive and inductive methods was conducted by the researcher. Similar to the Holland et al. (1989) approach, deductive coding came from a review of related literature on the topics of board performance and effectiveness, and inductive coding techniques were used to review interview transcripts and focus group results. The codes were then compared to identify emergent themes as well as any additional themes not already found in the literature.

Kezar (2006) specified six elements of high performing boards, including leadership, culture, education, external relations, relationships, and structure. They are described as being “related and interactive, creating a holistic, process model described as critical within the literature on board performance” (p. 983). The six elements are described as follows:

Leadership involves focusing on a common vision and purpose, a multiyear agenda, asking tough questions, and the board chair and CEO leadership.

Culture includes nurturing desired qualities and building a professional, nonpartisan culture.

Education refers to board orientation, ongoing education, educational opportunities outside of board meetings, strong data support from board staff, and education evolving out of the evaluation processes.

External relations includes coordinating with legislature and governor’s strategic plans, joint goal setting, sophisticated communication vehicles across layers of governance, access to the governor or important state officials, and staying on the agenda even as governor’s turn over.

Relationships refer to the CEO and board chair, communication from the CEO to each board member, board members engage university constituents, and board meetings include a social aspect.

Structure involves clarifying the role of the board, developing ad hoc committees, board chair rotation, ongoing evaluation, and leading as a collective.

Kezar's (2006) six elements bear some similarities to those identified in the Holland et al. (1989) six dimensions of board effectiveness. Both focus on the importance of board education in acquainting board members with not only the organization's culture and mission but also with board policies and processes. The significance of board members building relationships with one another and working together as a team are also represented in the findings of both studies. The findings from both the Holland et al. (1989) and Kezar (2006) studies on board effectiveness and improving board performance provide valuable information, and informed the current study on board effectiveness in the public community college.

Summary

A literature review of community colleges, governance, and board effectiveness disclosed a gap related to research specific to board effectiveness in public community colleges. The issues of governance in the community college are important to the success of community colleges in fulfilling their mission, vision, and goals (Carver & Mayhew, 1994). Governing boards influence the direction of the institution and provide a conduit for the community to participate in shaping the organization intended to fulfill the needs of its citizens (Carver & Mayhew, 1994; Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Holland et al., 1989; Smith, 2000). Amey et al. (2008), Carver and Mayhew (1994), and Smith (2000) postulated that the core responsibility of a governing board is supporting an organizational mission that reflects the needs of the community served by the community college.

Additional literature synthesized in this study related to the approval governance model and the policy governance model. Many colleges have moved to policy governance as is supported by ACCT and AACC (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). With this approach to community college governance, board members focus on ensuring policies support the mission and vision of the organization (Carver & Mayhew, 1994) versus an approval model that promotes board members to get more involved in day-to-day operations.

Finally, a review of literature related to board effectiveness in higher education resulted in a focus on two important studies. The Holland et al. (1989) study described six dimensions of board effectiveness and focused on independent, four-year colleges. The Kezar (2006) study described six elements of high performing boards focused on public, four-year universities.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to explore the lived experiences of community college board members as they relate to board effectiveness and answer the research question that guided this study: What are the lived experiences of public community college board members who have served at least two years as they relate to board effectiveness? The interview protocol was designed using the six dimensions of board effectiveness created through the studies of Chait et al. (1993, 1996), Holland et al. (1989), Jackson and Holland (1998), and Taylor et al. (1991).

The chapter begins with information about the research design rationale and participants followed by a detailed description of the data collection and analysis processes employed in the study. The final section of the chapter discusses the strategies used to demonstrate trustworthiness throughout the study.

Research Design and Rationale

A research method provides a basis of inquiry to respond to a research question. The research question informs the selection of the research method by differentiating between the design, analysis, and instruments needed to enlighten the researcher and answer the research question (Roberts, 2010).

A qualitative paradigm was used for this study because qualitative research is characterized by an interest in finding meaning in the complex personal experiences of individuals who have a similar framework from which to express those experiences (Merriam, 2009). Further, qualitative research is conducted in a setting comfortable for the participant, with the researcher serving as the primary research instrument (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, the qualitative research approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used

for this study because the purpose of the project was to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of community college board members. Personal interviews with study participants served as a sound basis from which to conduct the interpretative analysis associated with the phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

As a research methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is aimed at understanding how an individual makes sense of experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Phenomenological studies are based on a “detailed examination of the participant’s life world” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53) and is a core component of IPA; however IPA also incorporates the researcher as an active participant in the study. As participants reflect and interpret their experiences and share those experiences, the researcher is interpreting the participant’s interpretation of their experiences.

IPA was the research design method used for this study based on the desire to understand the lived experiences of public community college board members who had served at least two years related to board effectiveness. IPA is characterized by “understanding how experiential phenomena have been understood from the particular people” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 29) and by examining the lived experience of each participant (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Roberts, 2010). IPA was appropriate for this study because this approach focused on making sense of the lived experiences of board members and their perceptions of board effectiveness.

Participants

According to Smith et al. (2009), Smith and Osborn (2008), and Creswell (2013), the selection of individuals for a phenomenological study is best served by focusing on a group of

participants who have shared experiences. Therefore, a purposive sampling approach was used for this study. This type of sampling contributed to the researcher's ability to focus participant selection on populations that were knowledgeable about community college's board effectiveness (Creswell, 2013). As suggested by Smith et al. (2009), it was important for the participants to share detailed descriptions of their lived experiences of the phenomenon in order to collect a rich set of data for IPA.

The targeted population for participation was public community college governing board members from a western state. Initial invitations were sent via electronic mail to board members via the chief executive officers (CEO) of each public community college district in the state. The invitation (Appendix A) described the study and invited board members to participate in the study. Follow up invitations were sent to selected board members who had served at least two years.

A total of eight board members responded or were recommended by each respective district's CEO to participate in the study. From the eight board members identified as potential participants, only seven were available for in-person interviews during the data collection period. Three male and four female participants made up the final participant population sample. The participants represented five different community college districts with no more than two participants from any one district.

Once the study sample was identified, additional electronic mail messages and phone calls were used to schedule the interviews and manage logistics. Interview times and locations were established at the convenience of the participant.

Participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. Table 2 illustrates the participant demographics, including pseudonym, gender, years of board service, institution

location, prior community college work experience, and whether or not the participant had attended a community college.

Table 2
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Years of Board Service	Institution Location	Prior Community College Work Experience	Attended Community College as a Student
Lisa	F	2	Urban	Yes – Full-time	Yes
Stan	M	4	Urban	Yes – Part-time	No
Paul	M	10	Rural	No	Yes
Cora	F	32	Rural	No	No
Sara	F	17	Rural	No	No
Seth	M	16	Urban	Yes – Part-time	Yes
Mary	F	10	Rural	Yes – Full-time	No

Data Collection

Smith et al. (2009) described the qualitative research interview as “a conversation with a purpose” (p. 57) that requires the researcher to take a flexible approach during the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Phenomenology and IPA encourage a semi structured interview approach that allows the researcher to establish the general structure to guide the dialogue with the participant (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Interview Process

The semi structured interview protocol (Appendix B) began with a couple of general grounding questions intended to contribute to a safe, comfortable environment. The participants were asked to “recount a fairly descriptive episode or experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 59) related a memorable time as a board member. By encouraging participants to reflect and respond in a thoughtful, expansive way about their personal experiences at the beginning of the interview,

they were more likely to be comfortable in sharing richer details throughout the interview (Smith et al., 2009). The remainder of the questions in the protocol served as prompts related to the attributes of board effectiveness identified from the literature.

The face-to-face interviews were scheduled over a three-week period at times and locations convenient for the participants. The interview protocol (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C) were sent approximately a week in advance of each interview. The researcher also reached out to each participant a day before the interview via electronic mail to confirm the interview details.

Interviews were scheduled for 90 minutes with the interviews lasting an average of 60 minutes. They were digitally recorded with permission of the participant. In preparation of each interview, the researcher reviewed information about each participant at their respective college's web site and trustee association membership web sites in an effort to have a framework from which to build a rapport. This foundation information provided the researcher an opportunity to connect with the participant on issues relevant to them early in the interview process and contributed to a relaxed, comfortable environment.

The interview began with a brief introduction to ensure each participant was provided with the same information. The introduction process included completion of the consent form by each participant and confirmation regarding the digital recording of the interview. The researcher also advised that this was a conversation and that the participant would be encouraged to lead the dialogue, with the researcher primarily listening. The researcher did ask probing questions such as "tell me more about that?" or "what do you mean by ...?" to delve deeper into a topic or follow up on comments made by the participant that required clarity for understanding or additional exploration.

While the intent was for the interview protocol to guide the participant through topics related to answering the research question, it was the participant's own lived experiences that determined the interview flow and ultimate outcomes (Smith et al., 2009). Participants directed the dialogue with their own responses and answered multiple questions without the researcher interjecting the actual question in many instances. Open ended questions served as the structure of the interview. By using open ended questions, participants were encouraged to share meaningful insight into their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009) associated with board effectiveness in the community college.

Although the researcher served as the primary instrument in this IPA study, the participants led the conversations and the researcher was an active, engaged listener (Smith et al., 2009). Smith and Osborn (2008) posited semi structured interviews offer the IPA researcher an opportunity to "produce richer data" (p. 59), allowing the researcher to become suspended in the participant's world and their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher also took notes and managed the time for the interview so as to not over burden the study participant beyond the agreed timeline for the interview (Smith et al., 2009). A hand written thank you note was sent to each participant in appreciation of their participation in the interview process.

IPA requires interviews to be transcribed verbatim (Smith et al., 2009). This was achieved using a professional transcription service. Once the transcribed interviews were deemed clean and the researcher was confident in completing the coding and memoing consistently across transcripts, data analysis began. The digital interview files and original consent forms are on file with the principal investigator and will be retained for three years before being destroyed.

Data Analysis Process

Data analysis is a core component of ensuring successful qualitative research outcomes and involves a process of taking a rich data set of lived experiences and reducing it inductively

by condensing the data thematically (Boyatzis, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith et al., 2009). Smith and Osborn (2008) promoted an idiographic data analysis approach of reviewing one transcript in detail before moving on to the next in an inductive process to understand the meaning of each participant's experience (Simon, 2011). As one transcript is completed, the interpretations from one transcript may influence the interpretation of another, requiring additional reviews across all cases (Creswell, 2013; Smith et al., 2009), resulting in transcripts being read and re-read. The researcher was seeking commonalities among participants, but not losing sight of individual experiences that may diverge from others (Simon & Goes, 2011).

Establishing Subthemes, Emergent Themes, and Superordinate Themes

With this framework in mind, the researcher began exploring the participants' lived experiences represented in interview transcripts. For purposes of this study, the researcher applied an iterative, inductive method of analysis, to review transcripts. The process involved reading and re-reading 204 pages of transcribed interviews to become immersed in the lived experiences of each participant and to identify significant words and phrases. The transcripts were also reviewed while listening to 419 minutes of recorded interviews to further immerse the researcher in the data. Initial noting of impactful content within the transcripts was completed by highlighting significant words and phrases of each transcript and making notations related to the researcher's interpretations.

The transcripts were then uploaded into MAXQDA 11, an electronic data analysis program. The transcripts were examined in the software independent of the manually reviewed documents. The use of a software tool allows for data to be organized and analyzed in a convenient and efficient manner (Lu & Shulman, 2008). While performing the transcript analysis with the software, the researcher established a coding structure related to the meaningful

segments of text identified in the iterative process. A total of 28 subthemes were developed during this stage of analysis. Figure 1 shows the superordinate themes, emergent themes, and subthemes, along with a cross case review of the participants that addressed a particular subtheme.

Super Ordinate Theme	Emergent Theme	Subtheme	Cross Case Analysis						
			Lisa	Stan	Paul	Cora	Sara	Seth	Mary
Personal Development and Engagement	Board Education	Board Development	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Board dynamics			X	X	X	X	X
		Board Member Orientation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Understanding the Boards Role	X	X		X	X	X	X
	Motivation for Serving	Personal Agenda	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Prior experience with college	X		X	X		X	X
Board Engagement	Board as a Team	Board Member Relationships	X		X	X	X	X	X
		Diversity of Experience					X	X	
		Ethics and Integrity	X			X	X	X	X
		Working as a team	X		X	X	X	X	X
		Time Commitment		X				X	X
	CEO/Board Team	CEO Board Relationship	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
College Commitment and Engagement	Board Function	Data based decision making or evidence based	X	X				X	X
		Planning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Resources and Funding Challenges		X	X	X	X	X	X
	Board Policy	Processes and Procedures	X	X		X	X	X	X
		Policy Governance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	College Mission	Access	X					X	X
		College Direction and Mission	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Common Goal	X		X		X	X	X
		Do What is Best for the Students and College	X		X	X	X	X	X
		Maintain Big Picture Perspective	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Move the college forward	X		X	X	X	X	X
Student Success and Completion	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Community Engagement	Community Connections	Community Linkages	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Politics	Elections	X			X	X	X	X
		Lobbying	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
		Political Pressures	X	X		X	X	X	X

Figure 1 Themes and Cross Case Review

The researcher then compared the paper transcript highlighting and notations to the online coding for each participant. Consistency was found between the highlighted paper transcripts and the online coded text segments. The transcripts were reviewed multiple times. Transcript review included reading, memoing, and assigning segments to coded subthemes. The subthemes were clustered into nine broad categories or emergent themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Smith et al., 2009). The resulting emergent themes that captured the essence of the data (Smith et al., 2009) were: board education, motivation for serving, board as a team, CEO/board team, board function, board policy, college mission, community connections, and politics.

The emergent themes were then categorized into four “larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 187), creating four superordinate themes. The superordinate themes of personal development and engagement, board engagement, college commitment and engagement, and community engagement, were identified by looking at patterns among the emergent themes across all seven interviews (Smith et al., 2009).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is critical in a qualitative study as research findings are intended to inform practice or improve processes (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research has strength in internal validity according to Merriam (2009), based on the use of human beings as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and the researcher’s interpretations of reality are based on the participant’s own experiences. Several strategies contribute to the trustworthiness of a study and demonstrate rigor (Merriam, 2009), including the use of a research methodology that is recognized in qualitative inquiry and by using successful data collection and analysis methods that have been employed in similar studies (Shenton, 2004).

The trustworthiness of this qualitative study required obtaining a good set of data through the use of strong interview skills. As a higher education human resources professional with more

than 25 years of experience, the researcher applied her proficiency in conducting employment interviews and employee relations investigation interviews to the participant interview process. By incorporating these skills with the guidance of Merriam (2009), Smith et al. (2009), and Creswell (2013) on successful interviewing techniques, the researcher was able to obtain detailed accounts of the participants' lived experiences as public community college board members.

In preparation for the interviews, the researcher gained an understanding of the professional backgrounds of each participant through the review of materials found on the respective college web sites. This foundation provided the researcher a framework from which to communicate with the participants during each interview and to also understand some of the contexts from which the participants were coming. Throughout the interview process, the researcher used a flexible style of addressing topics that required more thorough vetting, contributing to the credibility of the data collection process. Other strategies used to interpose trustworthiness were triangulation and member checks.

During the current study, it was important for the researcher not to influence responses of participants with anecdotal comments related to her own experiences with board members. In addition, the researcher strived to focus on the lived experiences of the study participants and the perceptions of board effectiveness as seen through the participants' lens.

Triangulation

Lincoln and Guba (1986) encouraged researchers to collaborate with professionals familiar with qualitative inquiry throughout the data collection and analysis process to alleviate the potential of becoming too focused on flawed assumptions or failing to take time to conduct a deeper exploration into relevant data. To this end, the researcher met regularly with her

committee advisor throughout the data collection and analysis processes to ensure the approaches being used were consistent with IPA strategies.

Triangulation was also achieved by working with two peer researchers who had conducted IPA studies of their own. The researcher shared one transcript with the peer researchers, along with the project proposal outline. The colleagues were asked to review the transcript marking significant words and phrases within their own time constraints. One of the colleagues approached this review from a Smith et al. (2009) descriptive and linguistic analysis process, highlighting descriptive comments and language usage, along with adding comments and notations about the highlighted segments. The second colleague completed the review by connecting her own highlighted segments to the related dimensions of board effectiveness (Holland et al. 1989). Once the researcher had also reviewed, highlighted significant phrasing, and completed memoing of the transcript being used for triangulation, all three transcripts were displayed side by side to compare for consistency. This process revealed very similar outcomes, with the majority of segments highlighted across all three transcripts. This process provided the researcher with confidence that her review process was identifying significant segments in the transcripts relevant to the study.

Member Checks

Credibility of a qualitative study is also demonstrated through member checks (Merriam, 2009). For this study, member checks included asking participants to review interview transcripts for completeness and accuracy prior to data analysis. Of the seven participants, four responded to the initial transcript review with only minor changes, primarily related to the spelling of names. In addition, the participants were invited to review a narrative description of their respective interviews and a table of the initial subthemes (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam, 2009; Miles &

Huberman, 1994; Shenton, 2004). Three of the seven responded to the second invitation for review. The responses were very positive in nature, suggesting that the researcher could have some level of confidence with the data analysis process. One participant responded, “Wendy – one word: WOW!!! This is super-duper work. This is important work for all trustees at all levels of experience. I have no other comments – just keep going!!” Another participant responded, “I thought you captured it well.” The member checks contributed to the study’s trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004) by verifying data consistency and completeness with the transcript review and support for the initial subthemes identified.

Summary

This chapter described the research methods employed for this qualitative, IPA study related to the lived experiences of public community college board members as they relate to board effectiveness. The study involved interviews of seven participants from five different community colleges in one western state. Interview transcripts were reviewed multiple times both in hard copy and in an electronic data analysis program. Significant segments of the transcripts were coded into subthemes and the 28 subthemes were clustered into nine emergent themes and the further synthesized into four superordinate themes through an inductive process.

The study employed various strategies to ensure trustworthiness, including using IPA, an accepted approach of qualitative research that is appropriate to the research design and question. In addition, the researcher used triangulation and member check methods to promote credibility and ensure a sound study from which the practice of community college governing board can be advanced.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter provides a description of the study participants and the findings that address the research question: What are the lived experiences of public community college board members who have served at least two years as they relate to board effectiveness? This is followed by an explanation of the superordinate and emergent themes that evolved during the data analysis process used to respond to the research question.

Participants

There were seven participants in this study; four women and three men. The participants represented five different colleges from both urban and rural community college districts in a western state. Four of the participants were originally elected to the board with the remaining three having been appointed to complete a vacated term. Participants had served their respective boards for between 2 and 32 years. Four had prior experience with the college as either a full-time or part-time employee and three of the participants had taken classes from the college. Two participants had received degrees from the college for which they were a board member. A brief description of each participant follows in the order in which interviews were conducted.

Lisa

Lisa had prior experience as a student and as an employee in addition to serving as a board member, all for the same community college. She received an associate's degree that catapulted her on to achieve advanced degrees and a successful career in higher education. Lisa was motivated to seek election to the governing board because of her passion for ensuring the educational opportunities the college provided for her continue to exist for her children and her children's children.

Stan

Stan did not have prior experience with the college as a student or employee but viewed serving as a board member as important to the communities served by the college. He saw the community college as creating affordable, accessible higher education for a large number of students. Stan was also motivated to seek election to the board as a way to give back and to bring about more focus on career and technical education, for which he has a passion.

Paul

Prior experience as a student and a long history of family connections to the college influenced Paul to seek appointment to the governing board when a vacant position came open. He is passionate about the mission of the college and the impact it has on rural communities within his district. He had received a degree from the college before continuing his education at a university.

Cora

Cora was familiar with the college as a member of the community and knew the value of education to the citizens when she ran for election to the board more than 30 years ago. Consistent with other participants' views of the value of the college in the community, Cora felt that the college was really important to the rural parts of the district the college served in providing access to higher education.

Sara

Sara was first appointed to the board 17 years ago when a vacancy occurred mid-term and intended to only finish out the remaining two years of that term but she became "hooked." She has continued to seek re-election because she recognizes the value the college has in the community by providing educational opportunities.

Seth

Seth was interested in seeking election to the board 16 years ago because of his long time interest in education, his desire to make a contribution to the community, and his view of the value-added impact that education has on the economy. Seth had limited prior experience with the college, having taken a few classes at the college while working on his undergraduate degree at a nearby university.

Mary

Mary had prior experience as an employee of the college before becoming a board member 10 years ago. She was appointed after another board member resigned mid-term and was interested in serving on the governing board to make a difference in how the college operated. Mary originally came on the board thinking she would be able to “fix all those things” she had found challenging as an employee.

Superordinate and Emergent Themes

Four superordinate themes and nine emergent themes were identified during the data analysis processes that address the research question: What are the lived experiences of public community college board members who have served at least two years as it relates to board effectiveness?

The four superordinate themes are personal development and engagement, board engagement, college commitment and engagement, and community engagement. Each superordinate theme was developed from nine emergent themes, including board education, motivation for serving, board as a team, CEO/board team, board function, board policy, college mission, community connections, and politics. A graphical representation of the superordinate and emergent themes is show in Figure 2.

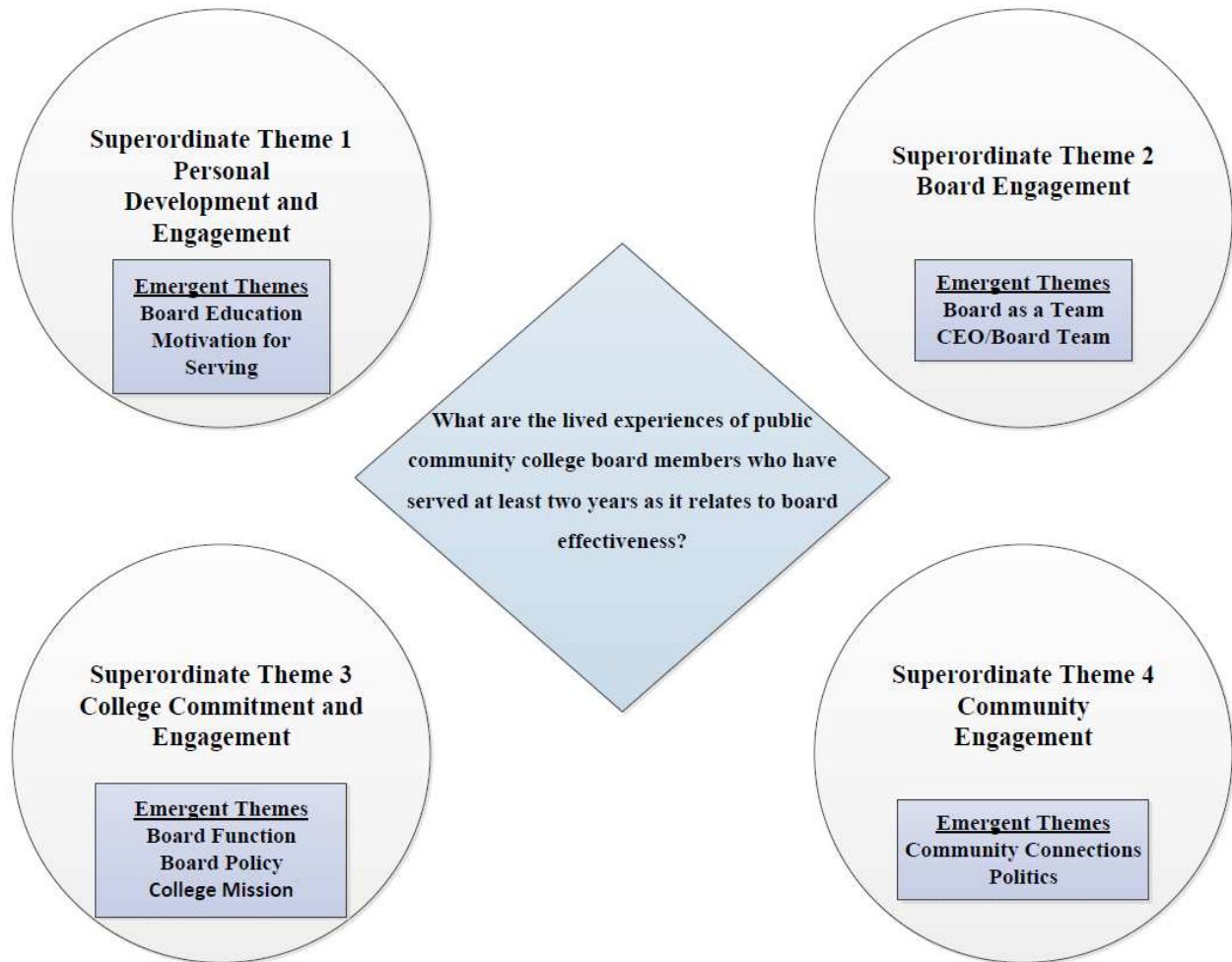


Figure 2. Superordinate and emergent themes

Personal Development and Engagement

The first superordinate theme to be described is personal development and engagement. The emergent themes included under this superordinate theme are board education and motivation for serving.

The study participants did not claim to have known everything there was to know about being a board member when they were appointed or elected or even after serving for several years in some cases. Each participant talked about the need to learn what being a board member is all about and to continue this development process throughout their time on the board. Many

also discussed the necessity of taking the initiative to seek out development opportunities and not expect to just show up at meetings. The need for board education throughout their experience as board members was a prevalent theme for all board members and most talked about the importance of moving beyond any personal agendas that may have initially motivated them to serve as being important in being effective as a board member.

Board Education

For the participants, board education evolved around the subthemes of board member orientation, ongoing board member professional development, and managing the motivations for serving as a board member. Each of these areas had commonalities among participants and a few diverging thoughts and experiences as well. All participants had experiences with ACCT trainings and additional development through board retreats and study or work sessions. Participants had different experiences with orientation to the role of being a board member, and most indicated that the board orientation process had evolved over time and had become somewhat more intentional and formal in recent years.

Lisa indicated she did not receive any orientation or training when she became a board member two years ago. She initiated her own education by seeking out board policies and bylaws from another board member, only to find outdated documents that had not been reviewed or revised in over 10 years.

[When] I came on as a board member, was I trained? Absolutely zero. I had asked [another board member] for the bylaws book and any manuals, and he gave me something from 1999. The bylaws have not been changed or looked at. Many of the college policies have not been looked at, and they had not been trained. The only thing that [the former CEO] would do is to take [the board] to AACC when it was lobbying time to go see the legislators. He never had a board training, he never had any professional development about what it's like to be an effective board member, because he didn't want to have a board that was an effective board.

Lisa's college was experiencing challenging times with changes in leadership, community complaints about the college's direction, and concerns from the accreditor related to governance. The college was being led by an interim CEO when Lisa started, so she participated in the search process to replace the CEO as a new board member. Lisa had come from higher education administration and knew that training and professional development activities were important. She began working with other board members to update policies and implement a more formal orientation process for future new board members. Lisa also attended ACCT trainings, including the governance board institute and leadership institute for board chairs. Lisa's board attended a governance institute on student success (GISS) recently and she found it to be "a pinnacle turning point for [her] board," leaving her feeling optimistic for the future.

The hardest thing for me is to learn to be an effective board member because I had been a college administrator. I know what that's like. I know that boundary. But learning the boundary of an effective board member? That's a whole different ball of wax.

The college's board orientation has become a more formal activity and includes meetings with the CEO and each board member, as well as with college leadership and tours of facilities. Lisa said that the newest board member was also connected with a mentor from the board as part of the orientation process. The entire process takes several months depending on the new board member's schedule, but Lisa feels it helps the new board member to learn about the college, the initiatives, and the culture of the different college locations.

He has a mentor and he had campus orientations and center orientations, since we have six campuses and several learning centers where we have adult basic ed. And he went to, to my knowledge, I think he just completed it, and it was several months of meetings.

Stan came to the board five years ago with little understanding of policy governance but has become a "disciple because it works." Stan's board does not have formal orientation but they rely on the CEO and other board members to coach new board members on how the board works and the board's role.

You know [orientation is] extremely important. We rely on our CEO to get the job done. And it really requires a lot of communications between board members and the CEO to keep things above board so there's not any question about where each of the members and CEO are. Do we have everything we need? That's up to each individual board member to know what their requirements are for their personal needs to make sure that we're monitoring appropriately and effectively. The new board members don't know what they don't know. And that's something that we work out as board leaders. The present board chair right now is a new member, too. So we're trying to make sure that everybody understands what is available to us and the role that we play in that monitoring process.

From Stan's perspective, board members are elected officials and need to take initiative to learn about being an effective board member. Because they are elected, Stan does not feel there can be required education. He said, "It's up to the board member, of course. They're elected. We have very little control over what they would do and don't do."

Board members are provided with books on policy governance and they have committees that review board policies. Stan and other board members from his college have participated in ACCT education sessions, including national and regional conferences and workshops. He also said he strives to make every meeting educational and ensuring everyone is informed and engaged. He said, "I think we do a pretty good job of making sure that they're aware of the issues and what they should be involved in."

Paul has been on the board for 10 years and appreciates the board education he receives through board meetings, work sessions, and board retreats. He said they did not have much of an orientation when he became a board member but feels the college is doing better by providing some orientation to higher education acronyms, information about the college's organizational structure, mission, and strategic initiatives.

Well, that's one of the things that we probably should have done a little better because we didn't have much orientation when I first came on. It was kind of OJT, on the job [training]. But I think you know, after you're there long enough, eventually, you pick it up. And I think we've talked about that, and we're going to try to give a little better job of orientation because, like I said, they come up with all of these acronyms. And I don't even know what they're talking about. ACCT's and ADGB's. I had no clue what they

were. So I think we need to work on that. I think [board member] did a little better, and I think we'll do better, you know, if we get the new board member.

The board also moves board meetings around the district, providing all of the board members with more of an understanding about the communities served by the college. The ACCT leadership institute and GISS were some of the additional activities Paul participated in as a board member. He indicated he felt good about where the college was in relation to other colleges attending the sessions. The study sessions and executive sessions also provide the board with information needed to serve effectively. He said, "We always do [a study session] for the budget. And then if we have to come up with something like that, you know, any legal problems or anything, we do [an executive session]."

When **Cora** started as a board member 32 years ago, the CEO met with her and gave her a few books of policies mostly describing the things she was not supposed to do.

Whenever I got on the board, my orientation was – the CEO came to [city] where I was working that particular day and took me to lunch and told me what a board member was supposed to do. And he had a book that he'd had his secretary – a booklet, typed up, of mostly what board members could not do. That was my training and the CEO of the college, and I think he was fairly typical, probably across the United States, at least at that time, that the CEO ran the college, and he told the board what to do when it came time to vote for the board president, he told us, who would be president of the board.

Cora's college has become much more intentional about board member orientation. She describes a more formal process that new board members go through.

Now we have – sometimes a two-day, sometimes a one-day session, depending on what the new board member would prefer. Each board member has a session with that board member to explain what they feel boardsmanship is all about and each division in the college has a meeting with that person to tell them about the finances and the budget. I mean, it's really pretty heavy stuff and we are into policy governance, so we really stress the policy governance part of it.

I think it was an hour and a half session, that each one of us had with [the new board member] to get a little bit acquainted and just let them know how we felt and you know, everybody has their own pitch on exactly the same thing. And that's probably a good idea, because I can think I'm so right and I can be just the opposite of you and you think you're just right and hey maybe we're both right, or both wrong.

Cora's board also participates in ACCT conferences and trainings as part of her own board education. She feels the most important activity she participates in the ACCT National Legislative Summit because she feels things really get done.

I have been attending most of the ACCT things since I've been on the board. First one I went to was in San Antonio, I don't know, probably 31, 30 years ago or something, and the meeting that I think is the most important is the National Legislative Summit, because actually something gets done. And used to we went and the board presented to our legislators, now from [the college], we take students and they spend the entire year getting ready and they apply to that and they go and some of them are phenomenal. They're living what they're asking for.

Cora's board also has periodic study sessions or mini board retreats to learn about topics in more detail, and they travel around the district for meetings resulting in board members learning about the communities served and the different facilities the college has and programs offered.

Sara did not receive any training or orientation when she came on to the board through the appointment process 17 years ago. She took the initiative to seek training through ACCT by attending conferences, workshops, online webinars, and the leadership institute. While talking about orientation, Sara was adamant that a formal, intentional process should exist for board members.

This is a great topic, you know, orientation is just like such a mess. There's not even a standardization if that would be a goal, in [state]. Uh, this is one of the many reasons – I'm going to divert from it, but I'll come back. I got involved with ACCT, this national bunch of gorilla trustees, because I was getting nothing, nothing, zero in [state]. Actually, I was getting so little in [state] I became quite ready to jump in an airplane and fly to D.C. in February, which in itself is crazy, just so I could get a better orientation. Now, and this is not being judgmental on the college or any of the leaderships at the time or even the other trustees. It just wasn't in the checklist.

I believe that orientation of new trustees is critical, and it needs to be part of a process. It needs to be on the checklist. It needs to be not a big deal. It needs to be just this is what we do. And when that new trustee comes in, either appointed or elected, that process should involve the whole board.

[A new board member] should be given a small book that centers on policy governance, but it should be realistic to the way we're doing it, not this academic, they just took it from John Carver's workshop and put it in a book.

She also discussed the importance of not only new board members having a development process but the entire board should be involved. In addition to ACCT activities, Sara talked about attending a workshop on policy governance facilitated by John Carver, a renowned author on the topic.

When I came on the board, I was handed a book that was about two inches thick, and it was called – it was the same book we have now, but it was like four times bigger and it was based on policy governance and you had the typical ends and means and internal policy and external policies and the limitations with the CEO. You know all that. It was just in the book. The reality though that we saw play out, at least during that presidential hiring process, is we didn't have a clue what policy governance was because if we did we wouldn't have behaved that way for one thing, and I think that whole process would have been a little bit different. So this board I believe has been to me the most effective if you look at it that way. Policy governance, I am a big fan of. I have gone to many – actually, I went to a three-day seminar. I went to something with Dr. John Carver – personally. This is obviously before he passed away. And I loved the concept. I loved the philosophy of it, but like any other philosophy, the devil is in the detail.

Sara also found value in periodic board retreats and study sessions to educate the board on issues that are important to the college from not only a district level but from a national perspective. She is involved in the leadership of ACCT and works with board members across the country. She feels that this involvement has helped her to understand the issues the college faces from more diverse perspectives and has helped her to grow her network so when her board faces an issue that may be new to them, she can reach out to board members from around the country to gain insights and another viewpoint on topics of interest.

I get all of the emails and Facebooks from all across the nation because I have these little buddies, the ladies – in Illinois, the buddies in Florida. I like it because it keeps you then grounded on this. It's puts all of this in context. That's why student success is important. That's why everything speaks is important. All the different colleges and trustees talk about different ways. Here's an example. Geez, and I've got 50 emails after this whole GED topic, and thank goodness [board member] has just got the sharpest brain to bring that forward and make us really drill down and look at it and then move it to the state. Anyway, I have a little friend that's a trustee in Wisconsin. I sent a text to [board

members] because [board member] has presented at our board retreats what they're doing on the GED changes. So, I asked [board member], "What are you guys doing?" You know, it's just – it's just conversation, no big deal. He sends me back a list of all these people in Wisconsin that have – that are moving, that are solving this GED thing.

Seth's orientation as a new board member 16 years ago involved meetings with other board members to learn about the college, board protocols, and processes and to discuss motivations for serving on the board. He also met with the CEO and other administrative team members to learn about college history and tour campus facilities. He received a number of books as well, but Seth says the most important orientation he did was spend a lot of time listening and a lot of time reading. When asked if his orientation provided the information needed to be an effective board member he said no but responded as follows.

If the question were re-phrased, did I get enough to be comparably effective to the other board members, I would say yes. I think I learned enough about the college and enough de quorum, enough board protocol, uh, that I could make some intelligent decisions about the material coming to us and ask some good questions.

Similar to other participants, Seth attends ACCT development activities. He also mentioned HLC training and looking at learning opportunities outside of higher education. When talking about the need for additional training beyond that of higher education resources, Seth offered:

I mean, we all understand that through performance shortcomings in education, uh, but I don't think we necessarily address what that needs to happen at the board level and at the administrative level, because educators are, you know, much squishier than engineers, industrialists, cattle ranchers, you know. I mean, the fence either gets built or it doesn't.

Like many others, Seth indicated that their orientation of new board members had become much more formal, with a list of activities for the new board member to complete and the assignment of a mentor.

Our orientation has evolved over the years, we actually did have a formal list of activities that we wanted to have the new board member get. I was assigned as his mentor and I think that went pretty well because he had a strong introduction to the finances of the college, a strong introduction to the academic scope of the college – all of the campuses –

and a number of the issues that we've had over the years. Every time we turn around we're getting more rigorous introductions to the open meeting.

He feels that the process has been successful in ensuring the new board member becomes familiar with the college's finances, academic programs, facilities, and the history of the college. Seth also discussed the importance of a new board member understanding the open meeting regulations as an elected public official. Their board has annual trainings on the topic and he feels it has become more complex over time. Seth's board gains additional board education through board study sessions each month and periodic board retreats.

Mary had prior experience with the college as an employee prior to becoming a board member 10 years ago. She recalled one of her most memorable experiences being her first board meeting and the realization of the scope of responsibility she had as a board member.

I think probably the most memorable was just the first board meeting, my very first meeting because I didn't really know what I was getting into and it was a really sort of surreal kind of just trying to figure out what was going on and it stays fresh in my mind I think because I think most board members don't realize what their responsibilities are, what they're really signing on for until they actually do it and when you realize what you signed up for, it's a little eye-opening. I mean it's a lot of responsibility. It's a lot of big picture.

When she came on the board, the college had an interim CEO who met with her to discuss board protocols and provide an introduction to the software the board used for managing the board's business. She was also provided an overview of the college's finances and budget.

[Orientation] wasn't much because there was an interim president and he did meet with me. That's a typical process. What they did for me was an orientation on how do you use the software that we use, OurBoardroom, to do the board business and orientation on kind of what regular meetings are all about, the kind of things that happen at the meetings, a little bit about the college. They went over the budget in general, although that doesn't necessarily always fit policy governance, it's required by statute in [state] so a little of that budget review and it was pretty minimal.

Over time, Mary took the initiative to seek out additional board education by attending ACCT conferences and leadership institutes. She also participated in International Policy Governance Association (IPGA) trainings and meetings.

We do a little more than that now. More because we have a solid CEO in place and a little bit of a process so we do a lot more orientation on policy governance itself. What I did was went to a couple of the, the IPGA meetings to and actually ACCT, the Community College Trustee Association offers – on a national level they do trustee training and the year that I joined, they actually had a half day workshop on policy governance which they don't always do so that was good so I went to that.

We've tried to send our members to the policy governance association meeting or ACCT nationally. They don't always want to go. Sometimes they'll go one year and maybe not the next. So we do that. We do a lot of policy governance training. We had a workshop for the new trustees this year and went over the ends statements and the board policies in detail and talked about revising them if we needed to as well as training them in what they were.

Mary indicated that ideally, all of the board members and the CEO would attend the conferences, workshops, or meetings together as a team, but that rarely happens.

It's great if you could take the whole board and your president. The timing never works so sometimes, usually if somebody goes, the president goes and so it would be like one or two board members and the president.

Mary's board has a very involved calendaring process that includes two board retreats each year, open meeting law training, budget workshops, internal presentations on enrollment, student demographics, and other college activities. They also invite speakers from the community to present information at board meetings, like economic development groups, and city and county officials. The intent behind these presentations is to share information that may impact the college in the future or help the board in establishing the goals for the college. Mary says they build board education into every meeting.

We try to build [board education] into every meeting and then during the year there are different specific things we try to hit and then in October we look and see if there's anything that we haven't done lately that we'd like to learn more about. We had economic development people come in [to talk about upcoming plans in our service area]. And so at that time, [the department of transportation] came on and showed us

where the road was going to be, what they were projecting all the growth to be and we had a nice session, and then of course none of that is going to happen now because a few years later the recession hit and that's not even on the list. That's not even the 10-year list anymore but we'll do things like that when it seems like it's impacting what the college is going to do.

Motivation for Serving

The second emergent theme within the superordinate theme personal development and engagement is motivation for serving. The participants described not only their own motivations for joining the board but also their perceptions of why others were motivated for serving on the board. Experiences were described from a stand point of most newly elected or appointed board members coming on the board with a personal agenda or a goal in mind for what they thought being a board member was all about. In the minds of the participants, the process of learning about the college, understanding the role of the board, and how the board operates under policy governance transformed those with personal agendas or specific areas of focus.

Lisa's primary reason for seeking election to the board was her feeling that she wanted to help move the college forward and to ensure that the education she had received that transformed her life would continue to be "there for my kids' kids and grandkids and everybody's grandkids." She had gone on after obtaining a degree from the college to get advanced degrees and ultimately work in higher education leadership roles. This was done after having dropped out of college the first year when she attended a university feeling that she was not college material. Lisa passionately said, "I know the value from deep in my gut what a community college can mean for this community, for me personally."

Before running for election, **Stan** attended board meetings for a few years to learn about the college and the board. He decided to run because he felt that he could make an impact on promoting career and technical education (CTE) as compared to the incumbent running from his sub-district. As he learned more about the role of the board and policy governance, he embraced

the higher level work of the board. He continues to have a passion for CTE but has accepted his role on the board to work from a policy level and leave the details to the CEO and his staff.

Paul is one of the participants that had no real agenda or interests in serving on the board beyond wanting to be part of a great college that he had attended.

Well, I thought I could contribute something. And my family has always been associated with the college. I'm a graduate of college. And if I could help, I – you know, I think the institution is a great institution. And it's fun to be a part of it. I just thought I could help, yeah. I mean, I didn't go on with any agenda. I just wanted to serve this college the best way I could.

He also talked about how important it is for board members to “not let personal agendas get involved and not try to micromanage” the college. The board has operated under policy governance for as long as Paul can remember and he feels that having a focus on the “overall picture” and doing what is best for the college and its students is the best reason for becoming a board member.

I think the board has to work together with only one main goal in mind. And that is to do what's best for the college and the students. You could break it down from there, but that's the main thing. Not to let personal agendas get involved and not try to micromanage. But to look at the overall picture and provide direction. And help where your expertise will help out.

Cora was asked by a group of faculty members to run for election to the board 32 years ago. She did not have any prior experience with the college. She said, “No, I didn't go in with an agenda. I just went in hoping I could do some good.” Cora talked about other board members over the years that did have agendas, either personally or politically motivated. As the board members learned about their role as a board member and more about the college, the focus on any personal agendas were redirected, however there were still some that did not support the policy governance approach.

We've had some real show boats who want to be published in the newspaper and we try to get across to people that unless you're on the board, you're an individual and the

president of the board speaks for the board, but then only what the board wants him or her to say.

Sara was appointed to board after being encouraged to do it from friends and neighbors.

She had no agenda when she started on the board, but having been on the board for 17 years, she has had experiences with board members that did have agendas. Sara reflected on one board member that really wanted to micromanage the college.

Early on in the mixture of these board personalities, there was a gentleman on this board that was absolutely determined to run the college. Great guy, came in with a – he was an educator, a lot of background in education work from a very small town but he was determined to be more like what I would have called a school superintendent. And this is why policy governance was just on the shelf in the book. So his question centered around well, why did we choose this kind of brick and did we check with Johnny Smith in [community] before we bought that tile or why did we paint the classrooms green?

To the point, this was the story, I will never forget. This particular individual demanded that we go to the campus and look at the roof of the gym. Well, I just threw a fit. I just threw a fit. I called the chair. I said, “You know I am not going to do that. If he wants to get on a ladder and climb all over that roof, he can do that. I am not looking at a roof.”

I think the most dangerous trustee in the world is the ones that are not knowledgeable and come in with an agenda, either a personal agenda or an agenda other people have handed to them with the promise of we’ll get you elected if you close this campus, totally horrible.

Over the years, Sara has found that even those that do come on with particular interests adjust their way of thinking after they learn about the role of the board and how it operates from a policy governance perspective. Board education helps to focus board members toward a common goal of moving the college forward and keeps the board from getting “bogged down in these agendas.”

You know that is again the reason I think this board is much better than, as a general sense, other boards because we’re different but then we are cohesive in the work of the college. And as long as we’re moving the college forward and we don’t get bogged down in these agendas or in climbing on the roof of a gym, we’re fine.

Seth talked about having a lifelong interest in education and the importance of education to the economy. He was very passionate about the economy and the way in which a college education impacts the economy.

I've always been interested in education. I mentioned a second ago that I'd been concerned about some educational dynamics since I was in junior high, where you watch, you listen to instructors maybe comment about how this year's crop of students is less prepared than last year's and the years before; things like that, but you notice there's a tendency to try and teach to the lowest common denominator, which actually lowers the lowest common denominator for the subsequent year.

So it means academic achievement throughout the system, for all classes of students, even your top performing students, declines, you know. And in an era when we need higher throughput of value-added education, higher throughput of graduates with skills that really prepare them to work in this economy – that is a problem.

For instance, [county] is a fairly poor county and [community] is poor. There aren't as many opportunities for people, so the question in my mind becomes, you know, do you focus your resources on the programs that will grow the economy so that people have more opportunities later on, or do you focus your resources on [developmental education], where they will graduate without the skills necessary to get a job in this or any other economy?

I agree. You've got to do some, but you've got to take care of your economy. Without an economy – you know, what's the most valuable social program there is? It's a job. Nothing short of a job – I mean there is nothing that matches what a job does for somebody. I mean education is a big deal and it can help a lot, but if there isn't a job waiting at the end it doesn't help that much.

Do you know much of your founding father's history? I recently read a biography of Ben Franklin and he and John Adams exchanged a letter – and I don't know which one wrote it – but one said I have to study politics and war so that my sons can study science and engineering so that their sons will have the opportunity to study art and literature, you know?

And we are very far behind in this country. I don't think people realize how far behind we are. Our national debt is \$18 trillion. Uh, by the time we blink three times it will have doubled. Well, not that fast, but I remember when Ross Perot ran for president, you know? Wouldn't you kill to have that problem today – a \$3 trillion debt and \$500 million budget deficit? I mean, wouldn't that be wonderful?

We are very, very far behind. We are falling behind the nations that we compete with. We're falling behind the nations we partner with. You can't be a good partner if you have to be carried and we're in debt. We're in debt to peoples whose interest is not our own, you know. And being in debt to your enemies is never a good idea. Being in debt

to the mob is better than being in debt to the enemies because with the mob it's just about the money.

Seth described his experiences of board members coming on the board with “particular, narrow agenda” and it taking time to alter perspectives but once board members really understand all that the college is doing, their personal agendas are not as relevant.

I think over time even if you come in with a narrow agenda you see how much actually does get done, the value that actually is being produced – you see the weaknesses, you see the waste, and you try to figure out ways to fix those but mostly you go wow, we are doing a heck of a lot and we've got to keep going. And I think all board members uh; have that sense to really dominate their thinking on how they approach issues, at least after the first year or two.

Seth feels that being part of the college's board is “my opportunity to make an impact on the direction education goes and the priorities it sets.” While he is ideologically on the other end of the spectrum as some of his other board member colleagues, he does not feel “there's anybody trying to do a bad job.”

Mary applied for an appointment to the board after having been an employee and watching the CEO and board members make choices that she felt were not good for the college. She felt she could “fix all of those things” if she got on the board but in between the time she was appointed and her first board meeting, the CEO left and one of the board members that seemed challenging decided not to run again, so she “had an agenda that kind of poofed.”

Over the 10 years Mary has been on the board, she has had experiences with new board members coming on with agendas. Mary says that most learn about policy governance and respect the process of governing from a higher level but not everyone lets go of personal agendas.

It's not so much dissenting opinion as it is new board members coming on again with an agenda but the agenda is not a nice um, it's a, it's looking for problems and trying to bring problems to light and it, it upsets the board dynamics because we spend a lot of time stressing about what's going to happen. In reality what happens with the board meetings is that it all usually works out because there's right now, a majority of people who agree

that policy governance is the way to go and the real struggle is really about policy governance because when people come in the board with an agenda, they want to dig down into whatever it was that was the problem or that they think is the problem and, and fix it and they don't have the authority to do that but they fight about that.

Personal development and engagement is the first superordinate theme identified and includes the emergent themes of board education and motivation for serving. Within board education, the subthemes of board orientation, board professional development, and understanding the role of a board member were prevalent. The emergent theme of motivation for serving was also reviewed in both the perspectives of the participants themselves and also the impact that other board member's motivation or personal agendas had on the participant's experiences related to board effectiveness.

Board Engagement

The second superordinate theme is board engagement and encompasses the emergent themes of the board as a team and the CEO/board team. As board members move through their own personal development by learning about the college and board processes, they are also faced with the need to work effectively with the other members of their respective board. Throughout the interviews, participants talked about experiences with other board members and the CEO as contributing to their definition of board effectiveness.

Board as a Team

It is the board as a whole that has authority for the community college district, not individual board members so it is imperative to have the board working together towards a common goal. Most participants shared that building relationships among board members contributed to the group working together as a team. The participants talked about not having to

agree all of the time, but understanding and respecting that once a decision was made by the majority, the board would move forward with that decision.

Lisa contributes her board coming together as a team to the CEO's leadership and through ongoing board education that takes place in study sessions and ACCT events that the board attends as a group. When asked if she thought her board was working together cohesively, Lisa responded affirmatively. She said, "Yes we are. We're really working as a team. And I feel really because of the CEO's leadership, we're heading in the direction that I think the college needs to."

Her board is working together to ensure they move beyond the accreditation problems they have had by working on policies and processes that create a culture of transparency and strive for inclusiveness. Lisa feels that board members build relationships through the time spent working together in board retreats, study sessions, and regular meetings. They also have included time in the orientation process for new board members to become acquainted with each board member and the CEO, and have added a mentor as part of the acclimation procedure. Lisa feels the times the board works together focused on issues and working towards common goals has also contributed to an effective team. Four of the five board members had recently attended a state governance institute on student success. She described the experience as transformation for her board.

The GISS was, I think, a pinnacle turning point for our board, because we agreed on what we're going to do for student success. That's so exciting, because we're going to have a two day retreat in July, and we're bringing a consultant in who was a former board member herself and does a lot of consulting work. We're going to be transformational.

Stan mentioned that the time the board spends together during regular meetings, committee meetings, and other college activities further his board's teamwork. He said, "Time

on task is number one. We meet at least two or three times a month throughout the course of the year.”

With a majority of new members, Stan said the orientation process is important and getting everyone on the same page and working toward common goals in an ongoing activity.

I try to make it a learning experience for the new board members. If the questions that really need to be asked haven't come up, I try to bring those up. There are only two of us that have been on the board for five years or more. So I think we do a pretty good job of making sure that the new board members are aware of the issues and what they should be involved in.

When asked about the activities that **Paul's** board does that contribute to team building and building a cohesive team, he talked about board retreats, study sessions, and the monthly board meetings. These provide opportunities for the board members to build relationships.

Our retreats are good. We can sit around and discuss things informally. Those have been good. We're lucky that all of the board members get along. There are no personal conflicts or any agenda building or any of that stuff going on with our board. So we're really lucky there. Mostly just keep in mind that what you're there for is the good of the school and the students.

Paul talked about board members being very engaged in community and college events and activities and he feels those help to build relationships and connectedness among board members. He said, “We have all kinds of activities like the founders' dinner and all those events we do at the end of the year – graduation and the president's dinner.”

Cora has been on the board for over 30 years and has had experiences of boards working as a team and those that have not. She talked about personal slights she experienced when the entire board was attending a conference and the group went out for dinner but did not include her.

Well, with during the time that this gentleman (CEO), I'm using the work nicely, I still see him at functions and we embrace. And anyway, when we would go to things at the ACCT, he would take all the other board members to dinner, not me. He would take them to special things, like one sore point, because it's a place I've always wanted to see is the Space Needle in Seattle. Anyhow the board and CEO all went there, they had

dinner at a nice restaurant there. I wasn't invited. I mean he deliberately left me out of everything, he had Christmas parties, I wasn't invited. And I mean he was horrible.

Cora felt that the time the board spends together for board meetings, which generally includes a meal contributes to them building relationships and working together as a team.

We always have a meal, it depends on what time, whether it's lunch or dinner, usually lunch anymore since we have our meetings in the afternoon. And that gives us a chance just to talk and be ourselves and not be talking board stuff, and I think that's a good thing and whenever we have the work sessions and the meetings, we don't really have a whole lot of interaction otherwise. After a number of years, you're close enough that you do some things, like [board member] and I play bridge together occasionally. And when our kids marry or what have you, we usually go to the weddings, receptions, you know it depends on your age group and everything.

Sara felt that the board retreats were most valuable in fostering teambuilding opportunities for the board. She also indicated she tries to connect with the other board members occasionally over coffee or by reaching out to them on the phone to talk about things important to them, like family or events in the community.

See, team building would go back to these two different types of sessions, the board and staff work session and then the board retreat. And this one is actually even more convoluted than that. I think we do teambuilding when we meet for coffee. I think we do teambuilding when [board member and I] go to church together literally. I think we do teambuilding when I'm texting [board member] or calling [board member and spouse] and congratulating them on their daughter's wedding. I think our camaraderie is built through these personal relationships. There's a fundamental camaraderie to this business that also depending on these personalities can quickly become toxic.

Sara talked about her current board having diverse backgrounds that bring different strengths to the board. She felt they have good chemistry and get along well.

I think we do [work together as a team] and I also think, because I put a little question on it, and also I think, and this is good, sometimes we do not. I think it's good that all five of us come in with, you know, this goes back to that yes man thing. I think all of us think and ask questions independently in our own different ways, like [board member], oh, my gosh, he is like the best business man, money guy, I've ever seen. I mean he just nails it, and he asks those hard questions. I just love it, and [board member] is focusing on instruction and outcomes and all those educator things. So, I think we all work together but in our own different ways.

When Sara first came on the board, there was not a team atmosphere. The board was in the midst of hiring a new CEO and was split on the final two candidates. She described her first work session and the unprofessional behavior of her fellow board members.

The board was totally at a stalemate. My very first work session, I walked in, just got the appointment like the week before, and it was literally a hostile environment with physically two on one side of the table, two on the other and the person that was the chair did as good as a job as she could in this very volatile situation because they were just like entrenched two to two. So, I walked in, became instantly kind of like the little Ping-Pong to all of this. Well, in that discussion, they were trying to go pro and con with the two candidates they had narrowed it down to. Two of the trustees on either side of the table literally stood up and were going to start swinging at each other. Now, I have been in the classroom before as a teacher in the elementary system so I have broken up playground fights, but I wasn't going to break up this one, so I just kicked back and watched these two grown adult professional men act like little children.

Sara does not want to take the current board dynamics for granted as she knows they are only one election or appointment away from changing those dynamics. Because of the volatility of board dynamics when members change, Sara is very committed to the board engaging in education through retreats, conference attendance, and other meetings to help build strong relationships.

This particular combination of board people are going well. And that will probably not change until trustees change. As an example when [board member] is replaced or when I'm replaced. That's the reason why we need to maintain where we are. We've got to keep doing [board education and team building]. We can't just stop because we're all just patting ourselves on the back and we're all so wonderful right now. Well one election and that could just go right down the tubes.

Sara thought that the board members all bring different perspectives to the board that strengthens their work. She also talked about the diverse life and work experiences of the board influencing the success of the board.

We found them to be coming on with their piles of life experience, work experience and I think it makes the college better when we get a mixture of folks with a mixture of backgrounds as long as we start with the same lump of 'we all agree on this' I think it makes a great board.

Like most other participants, **Seth** talked about team building activities that contributed to board effectiveness. He felt that the conferences, workshops, study sessions, and meetings the board participates in as a group contributes to the board working together. Seth talked about the success of a specific workshop that four of the board members recently attended.

That goes back to board effectiveness and a workshop like that really gets people on the same page with clarity about what you can do and the choices that you're going to have to make can really help build the team. I think four of us went to that session and we all came away very jazzed about doing everything from the perspective of student success.

Seth felt like the board spends a lot of time together building relationships, learning about one another's priorities, and communication styles.

We had an ACCT workshop right after we got put on probation. We had one of our new board members do it. It was supposed to be a team building exercise and it worked okay. It was a typical ACCT thing and it was okay but there are times when I think you really need more, like a boot camp or an episode of Survivor or something like that, that people vote to get you off the island or off the fashion runway. But again there are limits to what you can do with a volunteer board. We have a number of meetings and spend a lot of time together. We do get to know each other and our priorities and our uh, our communication style.

Seth felt that the time spent together contributed to the board developing a culture of respect of one another.

Even the board member that I am on opposite sides of the most fundamental issues, I have a lot of respect for her and what she knows about the institution and her insight into how things ought to work.

Seth talked about the need to be patient with new board members as they come on the board, remarking, "What it takes is everybody having a willingness to listen and be patient with each other" and spending time working together to build a cohesive team.

Mary's current board dynamics are challenging but she feels that a majority of the board works as a team with one board member continuing to carry on with a personal agenda that create tension and anxiety. Serving as the board chair also adds another layer of difficulty and anxiety for Mary. The next two excerpts speak to the challenges Mary experiences.

So there's always that worry of is another one going to go crazy and then one board member who's been on for a little bit, he's unpredictable. That's really hard to deal with. When you talk to him one on one, he's right there with you and then he goes talk to somebody else, he's right there with them and you never know. So, I think I probably worry about that stuff more than I need to and then it's all okay at the board meeting but I also have to make sure that we don't have a board member missing when there's a big decision. I don't want to manipulate things but I also really don't want to let the college go down a path it shouldn't go and that's hard. This is the advantage of being the chair, is to make sure those things happen but also the rest of them kind of show up at the meeting and see what happens. I have to worry about it for two weeks. You know, this is why I don't like being chair.

Sometimes it's just a feeling or a pull in there. There can be dissension. It can be fine but there's not a secure feeling that all the board members are here for the same overall purpose.

Although Mary has experienced challenges, she felt that the board members get their work done and she will continue to work on bringing the team together through board education and reinforcement of the policy governance model of board work.

You know, it's funny because we, in the end, the end results have been so far just fine. After some of these sort of really awkward meetings where things came out that shouldn't have come out, you know, or it just very kind of accusatory sort of things happened towards the staff or the CEO or whatever and then some of them come out and say hey, good meeting. I was like okay. So I think it all depends on your perspective. So far, the work gets done. It's just a lot more, there's more feeling of we're in this together and we're accomplishing things when everyone agrees on the process. When even if you don't agree on the decision, when we agree on the process and we have a little discussion and then we'd make a decision and move on, that works better. What we're finding is that when someone doesn't agree on the process, then we keep coming back and having to redo these decisions.

The emergent theme of the board as a team was represented in the experiences of the participants from both positive and negative perspectives. When the board members come together as a team, the participants feel that they are doing good work and they find their participation as a community college board member to be rewarding. Those times when there are challenging personalities on the board result in some difficult experiences for the participants.

CEO/Board Team

The second emergent theme of CEO/board team was mentioned as being important by the participants. The governing board employs one individual – the CEO, however the CEO is also responsible for the success of the volunteer board by providing guidance on issues related to community college leadership and providing support for board education. Most participants also talked about relying on the CEO to manage complaints and problems they receive as the issues that arise typically have to do with operations versus board policies. One participant went so far as to state that having an effective leader contributes to board effectiveness.

Lisa identified issues with a former CEO and the trust the board had in that CEO as creating a problem for her college with the Higher Learning Commission and the school's accreditation status. For example, the board had come to rely strictly on the information presented by the CEO to the board and did not ask for additional facts or evidence prior to making significant decisions related to access. The issues that arose from this decision coupled with other unethical problems with the CEO resulted in the college being placed on probation with the HLC.

What happened is that [CEO] had, in my mind, convinced the board with the same data that he was trying to convince the community that no student who started at the lower level developmental education in six years took credit classes or any college level classes. Well, there are two issues. First of all, that data was false, and the board never asked for evidence. They only looked at the evidence that he provided them to make their rationale.

As Lisa came on the board, the CEO left the organization abruptly, so she and the board began the process of hiring a new CEO. They were also working on improving board policies and process to ensure the college was being lead with from an ethical and integrity foundation. Because some of the legacy board members remained in the mix, the board's CEO recruitment process was challenged by some community groups.

When all of the CEO candidates came in, [a community interest group] gave each candidate a letter saying that they should withdraw, because they weren't going to have support in the community, because this board should not be hiring them. Because the group thought that they would be able to recall [some of the legacy board members].

Unfortunately, the college was under a short timeline to make significant changes because of their probation status. Lisa and the board moved forward in finding a new CEO by conducting a visit to the campus of a finalist.

But here we are, on probation, we had literally 18 months to come up with a full self-study, and so I was one of the team that went to [college] to see [candidate] as the finalist. And when I talked to the people there, I was so impressed. Because I went early, and I wasn't even on anybody's agenda and I just wanted to talk to people. And without a doubt, every single person I talked to said, "Sometimes we didn't agree with [candidate], but we always knew that he had the best interest of the college," because [college] was ready to close seven years prior to that when he first became CEO, because they had been losing enrollment. And he was able to turn that college around. So I felt if he was able to turn that college around, even though it was a single college. He turned that place around. And I believe that he had what [our] college needed, and so I voted for him, and it was a unanimous vote.

Lisa also cited issues with the former CEO not supporting board education and only encouraging them to attend events when their position as an elected official could support lobbying efforts for the college.

Many of the college policies have not been looked at, and they [board members] had not been trained. The only thing that [former CEO] would do is to take them to AACC when it was lobbying time to go see the legislators. He never had board training, he never had any professional development about what it's like to be an effective board member, because he didn't want to have a board that was an effective board. He wanted the board to do what he wanted them to do, and it's exactly what he manipulated them to do, and they bought it.

As the college moved off probation under the leadership of a new CEO, Lisa felt optimistic about the direction of the college, the teamwork of the board, and the relationship that exists between the board and the CEO.

We're really working as a team, and I believe we're working as a team. And I feel really, again, because of the CEO's leadership, we're heading in the direction that I think the college needs to.

One of the processes that had been lacking under the former CEO was the board's assessment of them as a board and an evaluation of the CEO. Under the leadership of the new CEO and with guidance offered by the HLC, the board has started doing annual board evaluations and also goes through an involved process of setting goals for the CEO and performing an annual evaluation of him as well.

Stan has worked with the same CEO during his entire tenure on the board. He feels that the CEO is an integral part of the governance and leadership team, working with new board members to orient them to the college and its many programs, services, and facilities. The CEO also takes time to meet with each board member monthly in addition to the regular board meetings to answer questions and discuss issues that are relevant to that board member. Stan holds the CEO accountable for keeping the board updated on the status towards meeting their goals.

We rely on our CEO to get the job done. And it really requires a lot of communications between board members and the CEO to keep things above board so there's not any question about where each of the members and CEO are. We meet with the CEO one on one once a month. I have no way of knowing if that happens every month [for all board members], but I kind of feel it does. The CEO is open. One of the ways that [the CEO] is held responsible is keeping us informed of how we're making progress towards our ends and the fact that he's working within the limitations that we've established for the district and we monitor that.

The board works with the CEO to do an annual evaluation and ensure the board is performing effectively as a team.

Well, we do a formal one annually by law. Um, but part of the policy governance – uh, a big part of it is the monitoring of, not only the chancellor and the district as a whole, but each of the board members, uh, should be monitoring the board's effectiveness as well. And we have various data – data that we can draw in for that, but quite frankly, most of it is more subjective.

Stan's board has delegated a significant amount of administrative responsibilities to the CEO and they "hold our [CEO] and his staff accountable" for those responsibilities. They

monitor actions by the CEO through regular reports and committee meetings on topics important to board.

Paul felt that the board's effectiveness was tied to the board working together and by having a good CEO. The leadership the CEO provides to not only the college but to the volunteer board contributes to the team's cohesiveness and their ability to work together towards common goals like doing what is best for the college and its students.

The boards I've been on always seem to work pretty good together. But I've seen [another board] get crossways, and it's just a mess. So if you can keep your board working together and a good executive officer plays a big part in that. Boards need the leadership. The CEO explain [a recommendation] to the board and why they know it's the best for the college.

Cora indicated their current college CEO is a strong and effective leader, providing the board with support and the college with the leadership necessary to be successful. She has had experiences over her 30 years on the board with challenging CEOs, including those that tried to work as a dictator, telling the board what to do, how to vote, and who to select as board chair.

That particular gentleman became that dictator and we lost a number of really good staff, because – he was really bad. But he bought off the other four members of the board by partying them, taking them to lunch and dinner and what have you. I say that under knowing full well I'm being quoted, but it was fact, and I would say it to his face.

As a board member, Cora struggled with another CEO as well when she did not agree with the way he was leading the college and interacting with board members.

And he tried to get a restraining order against me so I could not be anywhere where he was, and they laughed at him. I mean, I wasn't going to do anything to him, but that way I could not go to board meetings, so since he was the president, I would have to be the one to resign. And I told him, "I will be there when you're gone," and here I am.

Sara described her experiences with the boundaries that exist between the CEO and board members. The board hires the CEO but they also rely on the CEO to support them by making sure they are aware of board education opportunities, keeping them up to date on state legislative issues, and establishing the strategic initiatives that help the college to work towards

the goals set by the board. She described the CEO board relationship metaphorically as a “hand and glove.”

I’ve always heard lots and lots of talk among trustees about how certain CEOs control the trustees, this is the game and how certain boards control the CEO. My observation is either way is not good. This should not be whose [in charge] we’re not on the playground. This should be hand and glove. There should be a fitting for this. Who’s in charge? I really don’t care. I just don’t get into that game, but unfortunately, some CEOs do and some trustees do.

Seth talked about working with a variety of different interim and regular CEOs as a board member. The board chair works closely with the CEO to relay information about board activities and also making connections with the community.

The board chair is the primary conduit to the CEO for individual board member input, although each board member feels comfortable going to the CEO directly but that information has got to get shared in some fashion.

Seth also talked about the CEO being involved in resolving complaints or issues brought forward to board members.

We do have a standard protocol depending on the nature of the complaint – it’s spelled out in our bylaws where it may get forwarded to the board chair and the CEO. It may get forwarded directly to the board attorney or forwarded to the ethics hotline or complaint office. In most cases the CEO and the board chair are simultaneously informed, but depending on the nature of the complaint it can bypass them completely. If it’s a complaint about them it goes somewhere else. We are very big now on making sure that no matter what the complaint is, it gets in.

Seth also sees himself as a member of the community responsible for connecting the CEO with community members that may have ideas or concerns about operational aspects of the college.

Sometimes we meet with the CEO to introduce him to a community member who may have an opportunity [for the college] or a concern. Sometimes it’s to discuss, say my role as [the college’s] representative to the [state board association] or as a member of some other community group. And I’ll make sure that the right people are talking to each other. Sometimes that will involve me sitting in a meeting with the CEO and them or me just making sure that they’re connected.

As the board chair, **Mary** works closely with the CEO in establishing the monthly board meeting agendas. The board may meet more often when there are special issues that need to be addressed. As the sole employee of the board, the CEO is ultimately held accountable for the means by which the college achieves the goals established by the board. Mary described an experience where a new CEO was hired that did not understand policy governance but once he did, the CEO produced a strategic plan that was very relevant to the college's mission, vision, and ends statements the board had established. It was during this time that the board did work on their ends statements, adding economic development as a major goal of the college.

And so suddenly they've had changed their process and we had a really good president at the time who we had to goad him into buying into policy governance because he had just come from [another organization in another country] with a different power structure altogether and – but he was able to see it and suddenly their strategic plan was linked everything to one of those end statements and, and now we have it big economic development center, the small business development center is much stronger.

Mary also talked about the need to conduct the CEO's evaluation from the perspective of the monitoring reports provided during monthly meetings in relation to the ends statements created by the board and to ensure the CEO is operating within the executive limitation guidelines established by the board.

We get to the president's evaluation which is in June and but we're monitoring her all year so there's no surprise. I know one person would like it to be more of a surprise but there shouldn't be a surprise. If you're not in compliance, it'll show in the monitoring. And so there are times when things are not in compliance and that's okay so long as someone's doing something about it and that we're not like leading ourselves wide open for a lawsuit or something. You know, so it's not always all, all perfect but if we do it that way, we're monitoring then we get to her evaluation and then it's just accomplished in the monitoring reports and there's no personalities involved. These are all of the things that make policy governance so good.

Mary describes one of the board's main priorities is hiring an effective leader for the college.

So that combination of having an effective leader, making sure that we set the right goals and that we're monitoring how we're doing, you know, the effectiveness means that we're

actually moving in that direction and then do the owners of the college agree with us, you know, are we taking their input into consideration.

The superordinate theme of Board Engagement is described in terms of the emergent themes of board as a team and CEO/board team. Participants experiences related to board effectiveness included having the board members work together with one another and the CEO. This cohesive team approach is built by the board members building relationships and coming to understand one another interests. The CEO/board relationship is interesting because the CEO is the employed by the board but the board relies heavily on the CEO's expertise and leadership, not only in the operation of the college but in promoting board education and collaboration.

College Commitment and Engagement

College commitment and engagement developed out of the analysis process as the third superordinate theme. This superordinate theme included the emergent themes of board function, board policy, and college mission. All seven participants related board effectiveness to the board's ability to successfully embrace the college's mission and provide leadership in defining the direction of the college through board policies. The participants were committed to working from a policy level perspective with a focus on moving the college forward and ensuring opportunities for student success and completion.

Board Function

Board function encompasses decision making, planning, and high level resource management that falls to the board from a policy and statutory requirement level. As the board considers the mission and board policy, the other emergent themes within this superordinate theme, they rely on the abilities to engage in planning activities.

When asked about the board's involvement in strategic planning and mission design, **Lisa's** primary focus was on the process by which the board approached planning and mission

development. For years, her college had not performed any external environmental scans at the board level, having a mission statement and strategic plan created by the former CEO.

The HLC dinged us for this one, under the previous administration it was really an internal college plan. There wasn't really ever a strategic plan where the community is involved.

When Lisa started on the board and the CEO left, the interim CEO at the time coordinated a large event with about 200 participants that involved community members, college employees, and board members to work on identifying future opportunities for the college. This was followed a year later with another event involving 100 participants focusing on the college's mission statement. Both of these events were part of the college's processes for addressing issues found during an HLC visit.

[Former interim CEO], brought in a consultant, and we had our very first what we called "futures conference." The board all participated, and it was a half day process where we actually came up with some broad goals, strategies. From there we actually came up with a strategic plan. There were 200 people part of that futures conference. But interestingly enough, we kind of put the cart before the horse, because what wasn't done, and we got dinged on it with the probation, is the mission. The mission hadn't been done, looked at, vision, in over a decade. So we just had our second futures conference two weeks ago, and every board member was present. There were over 100 individuals attending and there was a lot of good work that came out of that.

In responding to an inquiry of how the board establishes the mission and participates in strategic planning, **Stan** addressed the importance of planning for the future to ensure the college is moving forward.

Well, under policy governance, we simply establish the destination. And the chancellor is responsible for putting a strategic plan together. We don't get actively involved in the strategic planning process. There's one in the district but we haven't changed our policies as far as our destinations or our ends statements in the 20 years.

In a policy governance model, the board holds the CEO accountable for the strategic plan, operating the college, and managing the budget within the resource allocations and revenue streams approved by the board.

It's our job to monitor the fact that those [activities] are taking place through the [monitoring] reports that the CEO and others provide. We have to hold our CEO and his staff accountable to [operate within the policies established by the board].

Paul also described challenging experiences when faced with state funding cuts and the processes required by the college to shift resources through planning processes to ensure programs and services continue.

Our biggest issue was the state funding that got cut. And that's an ongoing, working problem. But I think the college has done well with what we were dealt. I don't think it's a bad thing for that to happen every once in a while. You know, it gets the fat out of the system and makes it a lean, mean machine again. So just as long as it doesn't go on too long it's good.

Paul also talked about the importance of the board doing high level planning versus detailed strategic planning.

Well, we do planning with the retreat normally. It's where we start saying what we want to do. But I've always told them in there that I don't like to get tied down to a strategic plan because it eliminates a lot of options if something comes up I think strategic plans should just be kind of general areas overall. But I don't like to get very specific with those.

Cora struggled philosophically to increase taxes or tuition, however in the face of state funding cuts, she knew that she must support increases.

I'm sort of anti-tax and so since I have been on the board, I've tried really hard to not raise taxes and many times we have lowered taxes and we've never, ever even gotten close to reaching our tax levy, the amount that the legislature said that we could have. And we are the only college in the state who has not reached our levy. The state had it on for a vote to take our funding away this year, so I know they will next year. So, it's now or never and we can't operate without the money because we have the two new campuses, the bond issue passed, but it only pays for the buildings and you have got to have furniture and people.

As with many of the colleges involved in the study, Cora's college has many facilities that are in need of being remodeled or closed. She found it challenging to make decisions regarding closing facilities that only a few use and balancing that knowing that those that do use the facility have no other option.

We have a current problem. We have the only Olympic sized pool in [my] county. It is horrible, it's 40 plus years old and it's crumbling. I mean, it will cost just to refurbish it and not do anything to the underneath, a million dollars. We don't have a million dollars to spend on a pool. One of the high schools uses it. It's used a lot but by a very few people. So, we're going to close it. It breaks my heart because it is the only pool of its kind, but we don't have the money to do anything about it and we're getting phone calls and emails on that.

The board function issues for **Sara** revolved around assessing the needs and any barriers that may be in place. She felt that the board's responsibility was to ensure that the policies that were in place created an environment where the college could achieve the goals set by the board.

I think the board needs to figure out what the barriers are to moving the college forward externally, and generally that involves either straight up politics or just community presence. And – and in the policies we should do, I think, should address those barriers if the barriers are, you know, like too low property tax then we need to change that barrier so we could bring in enough revenue to move the college forward.

When talking about planning, Sara said, “We need to look more intentionally at our own internal board processes.” She wanted to ensure the board's planning and decisions surrounding funding and resources would ensure the college is moving forward. She said, “We can't sit still. If we're sitting still, we're actually going backwards.” She was also emphatic that the college needs to keep progressing even when faced with challenges.

So, I am a big fan of – of progression even in bad times. We've got to keep moving forward. And I think an effective board should be doing that and then, um, getting out of the way.

Seth understood his role as an elected official as carrying fiduciary responsibility, ensuring the public funds are used wisely. He was very focused on helping the college meet the economic needs of the community and on managing resources and making decisions about the direction of the college within the confines of diminishing revenues. He described the challenges of balancing access with meeting the needs of all students that attend the college.

There were a number of people who were ideologically opposed to [a capability standard], that believed that we should take anyone who comes, no matter what their level of preparation and get them to where they want to go. I don't have an issue with

that other than the fact that it takes resources and how many resources do you – how many opportunities for education do you deny the student who has come engaged and prepared for the sake of the students who have come unengaged and unprepared.

But I wouldn't do what everybody wanted me to do, which was – it's okay. Pay no attention to the supply chain problems. We'll just do the best we can and spread our resources as thin as we can. At the end of that day when that problem grows, it pushes out everything else, you know? You've got to set limits on what you can do and you've got to set expectations for the supply chain below you. And the supply chain above you would also appreciate some standards, because if our graduates come to them, say after allegedly taking second-year material and they have to repeat their first and second years when they get to the university after having gone to community college, that's not good either.

Seth's experience with having the college on probation resulted in some anxiety for him as a board member and wondering if he is really getting all of the information he needs to make the decisions he is asked to make.

I just try to make sure that a process was followed, you know? If it falls in this threshold category, did we do this, did we do that, you know? If the board report says we did that, you know, occasionally I'll check, but most of the time, hey, I cannot examine everything in detail and I'm not going to. And you'll never get a board that does that, but we do have a finance and audit committee now, that does try to look at those things in a little more detail. But even they don't look at things at the level of detail that one might.

So, I always worry, what's the next problem that's going to send us – what's the next problem that's going to bring us to our knees? That's why I'm working so hard on that reporting calendar, because I never, ever want this to happen to us again. It's just cost way too much money to do what is fundamentally the most reasonable thing that – and most important thing – that I think we've ever done, short of operating, short of having the community college.

Mary's board operates under a strict policy governance model, with the board establishing the direction and ends and the CEO determining strategies for achieving those ends.

The strategic plan is the president's purview. The boards defines ends statements, that's our strategic plan in a way but some board members want to approve all those [specific strategic plan] activities and, I keep trying to explain that if you approve the strategic plan then our goals of president can come right back and say well, you approved the plan. You know, I mean if we want to really let her do it and hold her responsible then we have to let her do it.

Her experiences have been in having new board members come on without an understanding of the policy governance model and wanting to get involved in the administrative details of running a college.

In the earlier years, it was really easy to get into administrative stuff and so we had to kind of keep yanking ourselves out. We've gotten better with that so it doesn't happen as much uh, where we might have something on the agenda and then realize in a board meeting oh, this isn't our purview. So that stuff doesn't happen as much. um, it's more the, the um, the discussion from the board members and where they might want to delve into something and actually our board attorney has been great because she keeps us on track on open meeting law but she also will help to keep us on track a little bit related to the policy governance stuff.

Mary felt that the board should have a good understanding of the resources and funding challenges that the college has and work to ensure the community or owners understand what their needs are, particularly when there is a need to increase taxes or tuition.

We've done presentations. We've gone out and there was a year when we had to do \$3.2 million budget cut and we went out and did presentations to Rotarians, Shriners and all of that and then it asked if they had questions. We knew we were going to ask for a tax increase and so we were trying to prepare everyone by saying here's what's happening money-wise.

The emergent theme of board function included a description of participant experiences related to the topics of decision making, planning, and resource allocation activities. The resource allocation function was one of the most important within this emergent theme. A focus of several participants was the board's involvement in establishing the local tax levy that supports their respective colleges and setting the tuition rate for students as well. Some participants were reluctant to vote for increased taxes or tuition, but for the most part all supported these types of recommendations based on their knowledge of diminished state financial support for their colleges resulting in a greater need for resources to support academic programs and services that improve student success.

Board Policy

The community college board operates under the guidance of board policies and procedures. All seven participants talked about the need for board members to understand the board's policies and processes in order to work effectively as a board. Policy governance was the specific model of governance used by all of the colleges involved in the study, however there was not a consistent interpretation of what policy governance meant by the participants.

Lisa came on the board with very little orientation and took the initiative to seek out policies and procedures, only to find them very outdated and in need of updating. She referenced issues with the prior CEO not being forthright with information to support items the board was being asked to make decisions on.

What happened is that [the former CEO] had, in my mind, convinced the board with the same data that he was trying to convince the community that no student who started at the lower level developmental education in six years took credit classes or any college level classes. Well, there's two issues. First of all, that data was false, and the board never asked for evidence. They only looked at the evidence that he provided them to make their rationale.

The interim CEO that was in place when Lisa became a board member was continuing similar practices to her predecessor. The board's processes were lax and not following open meeting law requirements in her opinion. Information and board business were managed in a so-called executive session with other administrators attending and the door open.

This is my very first board meeting in January. [Interim CEO] was the acting CEO, because she didn't get the official job. And so the first meeting, and she's running the board executive sessions like [the former CEO] ran them, all the vice CEOs are sitting around with the board. How do you talk private stuff? I mean, well it's beyond me. To be quite honest, if you need to have a vice CEO of HR, you bring them in, "Thank you, goodbye." – not that they all sit around and hear the business of the board. That's how it was run. There were no study sessions, so a lot of things, from my opinion, got discussed in executive session when they shouldn't have. That's my own opinion.

Over time, Lisa was happy to say that the board now had regular study sessions to learn about issues they would be asked to take action on at a future meeting, like a new online

education program or changes to the compensation practices for the college. These study sessions involve the appropriate staff so the board can ask questions and find out the information they need before the regular board meeting.

So one of the things out of the HLC was a piece on board transparency, so I was on that committee and said, “Okay, we’re going to have the study sessions down in the public room, we’re going to bring tables in, the board will be there, we’re going to have microphones so people in the audience can hear us, but this is a board study session. We talk, but people can be there. We can call on the audience if we need some clarification or discussion. So the topic this week is a revamping of our distance education, because the CEO has a vision on how he wants to take distance education. And so we’re going to get to hear that information.

Lisa’s board also started holding executive sessions based on the reasons allowed in statute and under the guidance of open meeting laws. She said, “Sometimes we have more than one executive session, because now we’re talking about goals, the CEO’s goals.” Many of these changes came about as the college had a change in leadership and also as they moved through some serious accreditation issues that were related to governance and policies.

As Lisa’s board reviewed board policies and updated them, one area of focus was on the way in which board members manage complaints they receive. Until recently, there was not clear guidance or procedures for board members to follow. Now board members move complaints on to the CEO or if it is related to the CEO, it moves to the board attorney to be handled and the board is kept apprised of the issue and how it is managed.

In addition, what has to be strengthened in the bylaws is that when a board member receives a complaint, because sometimes that’s what happened previously that got us into some trouble, that we make a photocopy, that we give that to the CEO’s office, and when we have executive session, you know, if it is something that can be discussed in executive session, we take care of it in executive session. If it’s not something that can be taken care of very easily, we just give them copies and just say, “This is the letter that…” or, “This is how it’s being handled.” So we do have that piece.

As a relatively new board member and having been a college administrator, Lisa was struggling to balance her role as a board member under policy governance and getting involved

in the day-to-day operations of the college. She had also lived most of her life in the community so was connected with a lot of community groups and knew a lot of people so it is common for her to hear about issues from employees or community members.

The challenges for me personally are how do I know when I'm in my role as a board member and don't step over the bounds? That to me is the hardest part because especially my role as an internal [former employee], for the most part, now that I've been there on the board two and a half years, I think folks are starting to realize my role. But it's still a challenge. And I wish there was an easy answer. I mean, I've attended trainings, and you know, it's easy to say, "Well your governance policy, you're not day to day." Well, okay, I understand that.

Stan's college operates from a strong policy governance perspective, delegating much of the responsibilities to the CEO. He talked about not only policy governance being a challenge for new board members to comprehend, but governance in general. So many new board members come on the board with a narrow focus of what they think the experience will be and it takes time to educate them on the college, the board's policies, and the real authority of the board.

The new board members don't know what they don't know. And we just have to make sure that new board members, now and in the future, understand our role under policy governance. And for the most part, they do. There's some that still like to hold on to some of the issues and discussions in the budget. And that's something that we work out as board leaders. The present board right now is a made up of many new members. So we're trying to make sure that everybody understands what is available to us and the role that we play in that monitoring process.

When Stan became a board member, they spent time dealing with operational issues and not working a policy level. Although he "hadn't a clue" what policy governance was, as he has learned more about governing from a policy perspective, he has "become a disciple because it works."

When I first got on the board, we'd spend, you know, two hours deciding what color to paint the gym. Well that's not in anybody's policy. That is for somebody else to deal with. And it's hard, though, to step away from the operational aspects as a board member and into the higher level thinking that policy governance requires. It took me a while to get my hands around them. Still learning but if you've not worked at that level it's a change in your mental attitude. You have to really think high-level.

Stan is chair of the board's subcommittee that reviews policies to ensure they are in line with best practices and meet the requirements of the HLC and state and federal regulations. These subcommittee meetings are the board's opportunity to discuss issues with staff and bring forward recommendation to the full board for action. They are posted meetings, so all board members can attend and he said it is helpful for all board members to be present. While understanding policy governance is valuable, Stan said that what is most important is for the board to understand its authority comes from the board as a whole.

I don't ever think a board should always be unanimous. I think there's room in every board situation whether it's a seven-member board or five-member board for different opinions. The key is once the decision is made, the majority opinion is what we live by.

Cora reinforced the philosophy that the board's authority is as a whole and talked about different board members over her 32 years that had not wanted to embrace that philosophy. They would want to represent the board at different events and speak their own views versus what the board had decided.

We try to get across to people that you're an individual and the board chair speaks for the board, but then only what the board wants him or her to say. Even to this day we have a couple that really hate it that they can't represent the board at every single function and speak for the board. I think it's so very, very important that people remember that they're only part of the board.

When the board transitioned to policy governance, Cora was the lone vote against the change. At the time of the transition, the CEO was running the board and she feared that without significant executive limitations, the CEO would have too much authority.

Anyway, [the CEO] and this other board member went to the policy governance session and decided that was wonderful. So, he came back, it was voted on four to one, I was the dissenting vote, because, and I still say while I'm in favor of it now and with the CEO we have, it gives the CEO a great deal of power. And if you have a CEO who is inclined to be so, they can become a dictator.

However she accepted the decision to move to policy governance, and because of her writing abilities, she was tasked with writing most of the policies to make the transition.

But I had to be the one to write the policies for policy governance because I was the only board member who'd ever done any policy writing. So, they assigned me that and I do respect the fact that you're on the board, majority has ruled that this is the way it's to be, so I worked under policy governance, did the best I could with him, and now as I said, I believe in it and as [CEO] and I were saying the other day when I went to a meeting out there, I'm the only board member of even some of the ones who voted for [policy governance] who believes in policy governance, because the others will call a CEO or a vice CEO or faculty member and ask them to do something.

Cora had experiences where a new board member was overstepping her role by contacting employees and telling them things she wanted done. They involved the board attorney in reminding the entire board that they having only one employee – the CEO.

We had one board member who was particularly bad about contacting staff and telling them what to do and she was new and so we brought in the attorney to try to explain, You know, to everybody, so it wasn't you're doing this and therefore you can't... And sometimes when one of us needs a little bit of comeuppance instead of getting a comeuppance, as we would have way back from the other president. He would have called you and said you don't do this anymore. Our current CEO doesn't do that kind of thing.

Sara was committed to maintaining a high level focus. She “is a big fan” of policy governance. She also believes that board members do not have to agree all of the time but do need to keep “the whole concept of moving forward as the number one primary goal.”

I believe an effective board is one that moves the college forward and however that's been defined by plans or goals or objectives, but the board should be effective among the five of them to truly move the college forward. Now, whatever that means; that might mean, uh, building a new building, that might mean stopping a program if that moves the college forward if you have a program that's not doing well. It might be initiating programs. It might be hiring specific people that are needed in specific areas. But all that is based upon some sort of strategic framework, whatever that is. Most importantly, I think an effective board needs to do that work and then get out of the way. That get out of the way part is I have observed one of the hardest parts for boards to do. I think we trip our own selves up by believing we have business past the CEO.

When discussing board policies and processes, Sara talked a lot about the challenges of not having a formal, intentional board orientation process not only for her college but within the state and even nationally. As a member of the national ACCT board, one of her primary focuses is on board education and promoting some type of formal process for orientation. She said it

does not have to be the same for every college but she would like to see some standardized processes that are followed.

Orientation has got to become some sort of national if not state goal. And I think eventually as the state organization gets better and more knowing what that job needs to be that they will come to that. Not to say that all these trustees need to have the exact same book and not even necessarily saying it has to be policy governance. But certainly I believe orientation should be individual with that new trustee where he or she sits down with the president, sits down with the chair of the board and then goes have coffee with each of the other board members.

When talking about her own board, she said, “We need to look more intentionally at our own internal board processes.” Her board brought in a board consultant from ACCT a few years ago to facilitate a board policy review process and she found it quite helpful. She would like to see that done more regularly, especially when new board members come on the board and there is a shift in the board’s dynamics.

Now, if we ever want to have a board retreat and talk about the board, you know, we’ve done that basically really once with [consultant]. And then we did it again just as a follow up. So there is a balance there between the board getting together and doing their own internal work and then the board getting together and the CEO and the staff coming in and we’re doing more strategic talks. Because that would be what I would have called a staff and board retreat as opposed to a board retreat like we did with [consultant]. But that’s just me and both are valuable. Oh, yeah, actually, I would see a need to do both at least twice a year. Well, maybe each type once a year. And establish that in a process, you know just get it in the calendar so the expectations are there and it’s just what we do.

Seth talked a lot about board policies and processes. His board had recently reviewed board policies and made revisions but he feels they will continue to evolve. His board had not reviewed their policies for some time and from his perspective, they were working; however the HLC found problems with many of them. This prompted the board to take action.

I would say our policies are still evolving. For a long time we had stable policies which we believed were working. Uh, but one of the things that the HLC dinged us on was we hadn’t updated our policies in quite a while and so we’ve taken a look at several of them. I have made major changes in some of them. Unfortunately with the timeline we had, we haven’t taken the 20,000 foot level first. So again, it’s a little bit of a patchwork. It’s a little more coherent than it used to be. It’s better than it used to be, but I still think it needs to have that 20,000 foot look.

Seth also talked about formalizing the complaint process by which board members manage a complaint they may receive. This issue also came about based on and HLC finding.

We do have a standard protocol now, depending on the nature of the complaint – it's spelled out in our bylaws where it may get forwarded to the [board] chair and the [CEO]. It may get forwarded directly to the board attorney or forwarded to the uh, uh, uh, ethics hotline or uh, uh, complaint office. In most cases the [CEO] and the [board] chair are simultaneously informed, but depending on the nature of the complaint it can bypass them completely. If it's a complaint about them it goes somewhere else. We are very big now on making sure that no matter what the complaint is, it gets in.

One of Seth's focuses is on ensuring the college never ends up in the situation it found itself a few years ago, facing accreditation probation. To that end, he has worked on a board reporting process that encompasses the responsibilities of the board related to accreditation and compliance.

We're off probation. Yippee! But we're on notice, which is what? Well, it's probation with a longer timeline. You know, we have a year to fix a number of problems in the college that we've identified, that we think we have written policies to address and we have embarked on a path to improve our academic continuous measure of improvement, the student learning outcomes, which evidently has been a big deal with the HLC, uh, since well before I came on the board. So I'm a little bit worried about how did I, a fairly studious and intelligent board member, not catch on to that? And I'm reminded of Enron, you know? What's the first lesson of Enron? Don't count on accounting. That is, do not count on what people tell you even if they are outside folks? So one of our approaches to get to the point where we can actually have confidence that things are running as well as advertised is this board reporting calendar that two administrators and I have been working to develop and that we're going to roll out hopefully next month. I hope we'll be able to afford to do it because it's going to cover lots of areas and there will be lots of, hopefully, third party evaluation of our claims – independent, third-party evaluation of our claims.

As issues are brought forward for board review or action, he also looks to make sure policies and processes have been followed. His board also established a finance and audit committee that looks at related issues in more detail. As a volunteer, elected official, he does not have time to review everything nor does he think he should but he does think he should be confident that the college is following policies, procedures, and regulations.

I just try to make sure that a process was followed, you know? If it falls in this threshold category, did we do this, did we do that, you know? If the board report says we did that, occasionally I'll check, but most of the time, hey, I cannot examine everything in detail and I'm not going to. And you'll never get a board that does that, but we do have a finance and audit committee now, that does try to look at those things in a little more detail. But even they don't look at things at the level of detail that one might.

Mary is "100 percent committed" to policy governance and recalled her board transitioning to the governance model. When she started on the board, they were policy governance on paper but not in practice. She said, "It took years to get to a point where we could actually say we were practicing it." She perceives board effectiveness under policy governance to mean "is the college doing what it's supposed to do." She said the board does not make things happen, but through monitoring reports presented to the board, they "are supposed to ensure that it happens." To accomplish this, their board has a place on the regular meeting agenda to look at the board ends or goals and evaluate if they are going in the right direction.

As new board members come on the board, they are challenged to understand what operating as a policy governance board means. Mary's board has experienced some difficult times recently with a new board member having a personal agenda and not embracing the policy governance model. This particular board member wants to not only get involved in day-to-day operations but seems to seek out ways to undermine the efforts of the board and CEO.

I think her agenda has to do with things that she didn't like when she was an employee here and then doing some scrounging up to find out what other people didn't like so that she can bring it forward and so she's looking for specific things to point out that someone did something wrong. That's her whole focus. So she keeps coming in. So one board member guy had to miss our budget [study session] meeting last month because he had a personal issue and so we scheduled a separate meeting for him to go with the budget and she found out about it and so she had to come along, too. So I mean it was just that every opportunity. This is the one who's my former employee and she was fun to work with then so it's not getting any better.

Fortunately, there is a majority in favor of working at a policy level.

In reality what happens with the board meetings is that it all usually works out because there's right now, a majority of people who agree that policy governance is the way to go

and the real struggle is really about policy governance because when people come on the board with an agenda, they want to dig down into whatever it was that was the problem or that they think is the problem and, and fix it and they don't have the authority to do that but they fight about that.

Mary took advantage of several workshops and conferences to come to understand policy governance and not all board members want to invest time into learning about the process. Her board also brought in facilitators trained in policy governance to mentor the new board members through their first five board meetings.

We had a facilitator come in who had policy governance experience and this time, because one of those new difficult board members used to be an employee of mine, which doesn't add to the, the positive dynamics, we actually hired the facilitator to mentor those meetings, those new members through their first five meetings. So she met with them before the retreat in January and did a little mini orientation. She may have met with them more than once. We did the orientation and then before each meeting, she met with them to try and coach them through preparing for the meeting and helping to guide them toward the right the way that would fit policy governance, whatever their concerns could be and how to make what they needed to do work in the kind of meeting that we have.

The consultant also facilitated a team workshop for the entire board as well. Mary felt the services of the consultant were helpful for at least one of the two new members and for the team as a whole.

One of them wanted to be able to respond to the open call as things come – it doesn't work in open meeting law but it also creates this back and forth dynamic that isn't healthy. I mean it's, it's really hard to sit there in open call and listen to people tell you they don't like what you're doing and you bite your tongue and you say thank you and you move on. But as soon as you open the door to respond and your meeting is taken over but we still have one member who'd really like to be able to do that.

As the board chair, Mary worries about what may happen to the college if the balance shifts away from being a policy board to a board that wants to micromanage the CEO and college.

The worry would be if a third board member didn't want policy governance and right now that's not the case but you'd never know. I mean someone could decide they have to resign because of some personal reason. The elections could come up and you could get someone else so when we trust the process and people agree with policy governance then pretty much whatever. I mean if they if we did a tax increase request and board didn't approve it, the college would survive. They would have to make some additional cuts.

They wouldn't be able to do some of these new programs but if someone wants to jump in and make decisions about what's going on inside the college and doesn't agree with policy governance, that's where we have a problem.

This emergent theme of board policy described the experiences of participants regarding board policies and processes as well as their experiences with policy governance. Governing at a policy level can prove to be challenging and it requires attention for new board members as well as occasional reminders for those who have been on the board for some time. There is a fine line for board members to manage between focusing on high level policy decisions and understanding college's operations sufficient to have confidence that the CEO and staff are functioning within those policies established by the board.

College Mission

All of the participants talked about the emergent theme of the college mission and the importance of effective board members understanding not only the college's mission but also the college's goals and future direction. This emergent theme is captured most prevalently in the subthemes of college direction and mission, doing what is best for the college and its students, maintaining a big picture perspective, moving the college forward, and student success and completion, and to some extent the subthemes of access and focus on a common goal. The board itself plays an important role in each of these subthemes by understanding and being committed to the college mission, vision, and goals.

When **Lisa** defined board effectiveness she said, "It's all linked together: board effectiveness, college effectiveness, and student success." Throughout her two years on the board, Lisa feels her board has made a lot of progress in getting on the same page with goals, specifically student success. Because of the challenges her college has had related to accreditation, they have been doing a lot of internal and external environmental scanning,

reviewing of the college's mission statement, and planning that included the board, the community, and college staff.

The mission hadn't been done, looked at, vision, in over a decade. So we just had our second futures conference two weeks ago, and every board member was present. And there were over 100 individuals [in attendance and] there was a lot of good work that came out of that. We're having a strategic planning meeting I think next week, and results of that will be put forward and minutes are going to be coming out to all that participated in the futures conference. So the board is involved with it, but the board itself, what the board hasn't done that we're going to be doing this summer is our own board goals. So there's the strategic plan, the chancellor has his annual goals, and I think the board needs to have annual goals, but we don't – we [currently] have priorities.

Stan's board strives to focus on the big picture and holds the CEO accountable for the details of ensuring the mission, vision, and goals are met through the college's strategic plan and monitoring reports presented to the board.

When I first got on the board, we'd spend two hours deciding what color to paint the gym. Well that's not in anybody's policy. That is for somebody else to deal with. And it's hard, though, to step away from the operational aspects as a board member and into the higher level thinking that policy governance requires. It took me a while to get my hands around them – still learning. But if you've not worked at that level, it's a change in your mental attitude. You have to really think high-level.

Under policy governance, we simply establish the destination. And the CEO is responsible for putting a strategic plan together; having said that, we don't get actively involved in strategic planning. There's one in the district but, like I said, we haven't changed our policies as far as our destinations or our ends in the 20 years. We've kind of tweaked them a little bit but our next policy meeting; next week actually, is going to delve into workforce development to make sure that what we're asking the CEO to accomplish is still relevant.

Paul described board effectiveness as being focused on high level functions and doing what is best for the college and its students.

Well, I think the board has to work together with only one main goal in mind. And that is to do what's best for the college and the students. You could break it down from there, but that's the main. Not to let personal agendas get involved and not try to micromanage. But to look at the overall picture and provide direction. Keep in mind that what you're there for is the good of the school and the students.

He feels his board is committed to student success and felt that, after attending a governance workshop on the topic; the college was doing most of the initiatives discussed. He said, “I think we were doing most of it anyway.” While Paul has been on the board, he feels fortunate to have been part of so many changes and has “really enjoyed watching [the college] grow.”

Cora has a strong commitment to the college and its mission, vision, and value to the community. When describing board effectiveness, Cora talked about her conservative philosophy and how it has been challenged at times; however she understands the need to support the college with increased taxes at times to fulfill the mission and move the college forward.

She also talked about occasionally participating in mission review committees over the years.

[The mission] wasn't anything I learned about, but they did ask that a board member sit on their board committee, to write the mission statements, so I was the board member that they asked to sit on that. And so I did help with the some of the mission statements we had. And sometimes it seems they are almost too all-encompassing and too long, they're almost a story rather than a statement. And I disagree with that. But so be it, you know if the majority think that's the way it should be and the loudest speaker thinks that's the way it should be, that's the way it's going to be.

Sara talked a lot about her commitment to student success and completion and the importance of governing from a high level.

My positive memorable experiences have always tied up with a student event, whatever the student event, either GED graduation, the actual big commencements, the ceremonies at the Department of Correction prison locations, when we opened the automotive tech facility, all of the honor society stuff, certainly the nurses ceremonies, the aviation – anything that involves student populations, families, those are always terrific, always memorable and always very positive.

When asked about board effectiveness, Sara talked about the need to operate under a code of ethics and focus on establishing polices that move the college forward. She feels the hard

part of the board is providing direction and then getting out of the way so the CEO and college staff can work on initiatives to accomplish the established goals.

I believe other than the obvious HLC requirements for board effectiveness, which generally centers on integrity and ethics, I believe an effective board is one that moves the college forward and however that's been defined by plans or goals or objectives, but the board should be effective among the five of them to truly move the college forward.

Now, whatever that means; that might mean building a new building, that might mean stopping a program if that moves the college forward if you have a program that's not doing well. It might be initiating programs. It might be hiring specific people that are needed in specific areas. But all that is based upon some sort of strategic framework, whatever that is.

Most importantly, I think an effective board needs to do that work and then get out of the way. That get out of the way part is I have observed one of the hardest parts for boards to do. I think we trip our own selves up by believing we have business past the CEO.

Sara went on to reiterate the importance of engaging themselves in the community to support the college's initiatives always with a focus on moving the college forward even in challenging economic times.

I think the board needs to figure out what the barriers are to moving the college forward externally, and generally that involves either straight up politics or just community presence. And in the policies we should do, I think, should address those barriers if the barriers are, you know, like too low property tax then we need to change that barrier so we could bring in enough revenue to move the college forward.

I had said it different ways, but [the CEO] uses that term hunker down. I love that because it's a great visual. I used to say, "We can't sit still. If we're sitting still, we're actually going backwards." So, I am a big fan of progression even in bad times. We've got to keep moving forward. And I think an effective board should be doing that and then getting out of the way.

I believe [the current board] has been the best at being effective because I think [that we are] wildly different and crazy individuals [but] we each fundamentally have that same goal. Now, we all verbalize it differently. The way I talk about it certainly is way different but I think somehow each of us realize that we do the policy work I believe on these barriers and then we get out of the way. Now, each of us gives personal insight because I don't think you get on this board to just be a bunch of go-along kind of Charlie's you know. I hate that whole yes man or woman concept, but this board I think has been effective because we've done that. We've made the policy, talked about the barriers and kept the whole concept of moving forward as the No.1 primary goal.

Seth challenged the college's core mission of access in preference to student success and completion. He says the public community college has competing priorities in meeting the needs of whoever comes through the door (open access) and being committed to student success and completion.

The large number of students who come to us not only unprepared but severely unprepared and the fact that those numbers are increasing and increase every year and we try to set a standard of demonstrated 7th grade capability before you could register into a college-level class and get financial aid and that did not go over well in this community. And there were a number of people who were ideologically opposed to it – that believed that we should take anyone who comes, no matter what their level of preparation and get them to where they want to go. [Aspiringly], I don't have an issue with that other than the fact that it takes resources and how many resources do you – how many opportunities for education do you deny the student who has come engaged and prepared for the sake of the students who have come unengaged and unprepared.

Now, I believe you've got to try and engage these people and try to help them get there, but how [many] resources do you apply there? So I think among some of the opposition, the more ideological opposition, there's just a disconnect on resources and I think you'll find that a lot in society.

When asked about board effectiveness, Seth expressed the importance of staying true to his beliefs related to his original reason for becoming a board member – not to just go along with the masses, but to make the choices necessary to move the college forward. He was also sensitive to the integrity of the education students receive at the college and how valuable it is when the student transfers to a university.

But I wouldn't do what everybody wanted me to do, which was – its okay. Pay no attention to the supply chain problems. We'll just do the best we can and spread our resources as thin as we can. At the end of that day when that problem grows, it pushes out everything else, you know? You've got to set limits on what you can do and you've got to set expectations for the supply chain below you. And the supply chain above you would also appreciate some standards, because if our graduates come to them, say after allegedly taking second-year material and they have to repeat their first and second years when they get to the university after having gone to community college, that's not good either.

Seth talked about participating in some mission and strategic planning workshops when he first started on the board 16 years ago and then again recently at large, facilitated community meetings.

When I first arrived, we had a mission workshop with various community groups and we came up with a mission that was so long nobody could remember it. But it was probably more measurable. When [former CEO] came on board, he proposed a different measure, different mission statement which the board approved, which was college develops its community through learning – much harder to measure, easier to remember, kind of says there's got to be some real learning and some development, as in economic development or intellectual development or educational development. I would argue it's kind of all three, but how do you measure it?

I still think that mission, maybe with some minor modifications, would be a very good mission. But we're in the process of reviewing that now. We recently had a set of workshops on mission fulfillment indicators, which aren't really addressing what the mission is. It kind of seems backwards, but it's kind of getting a broad sense of what the community expects to see out of the college and then there was another workshop where we actually worked on getting community input on what the mission should be. And then we have some staff trying to distill all that and I expect that work to be done in the next couple of months.

Seth is optimistic about a recent training event on student success his board attended, stating “we came away very jazzed about doing everything from the perspective of student success.” Seth was not blind to the challenges his board will face regarding choices about how to achieve student success.

The problem is going to come in with what are our definitions, because I'm going to be more interested in the value-added throughput, measured a couple of years down the line than I am in okay, we got people another sandwich-making degree. So, we'll have fights around that, but we will not have fights around what kind of services we provide our students to make sure that they can succeed?

Seth's college has struggled in recent years with accreditation problems. He shared that he is attentive to details and found out about a lot of weaknesses in the college's policies and practices during an HLC visit. In light of those experiences, he has indicated he never wants to be in the position again of not knowing what he is supposed to know as a board member. To that

end, he has worked with staff to create a board reporting calendar with items relevant to the HLC requirements and to the college's mission, vision, and goals.

Well, I don't think we've actually faced an issue that big prior to that and we are still reeling from it now. I mean, we're off probation. Yippee! But we're on notice, which is what? Well, it's probation with a longer timeline. You know, we have a year to fix a number of problems in the college that we've identified, that we think we have written policies to address and we have embarked on a path to improve our academic continuous measure of improvement, you know, the student learning outcomes, which evidently has been a big deal with the HLC, since well before I came on the board.

So I'm a little bit worried about, how did I – you know, a fairly studious and intelligent board member – not catch on to that? And I'm reminded of Enron, you know? What's the first lesson of Enron? Don't count on accounting. That is, do not count on what people tell you even if they are outside folks?

So one of our approaches to get to the point where we can actually have confidence that things are running as well as advertised is this board reporting calendar that two administrators and I have been working to develop and that we're going to roll out hopefully next month. I hope we'll be able to afford to do it because it's going to cover lots of areas and there will be lots of – hopefully third party evaluation – of our claims, independent, third-party evaluation of our claims.

Seth wanted to make sure processes were now in place to ensure the college's mission could be fulfilled without the challenges that come from accreditation problems.

But on the other hand, I never want the institution to be vulnerable again. When we have to make a priority call, we have to make a priority call and I'm willing to live and die on my priority calls. I'm willing to live and die on the choices that I really make, but I am not willing to live and die on people's withholding information, you know? So, we've got mechanisms for the information to come forward.

If it doesn't come forward, you know – so the reporting mechanism, the reporting calendar is part of it is going to be, you know complaints analysis. Part of it's going to be student learning outcomes. Part of it is going to be legal things and contractual things that we've maybe not done as well: all the academic data or the academic data that's meaningful at the board level. And there's still some tweaking of the definitions of what is going to go into the report.

One of the real challenges **Mary** has experienced is getting the entire board to agree on the board goals and mission. Her current board has some difficult dynamics created by one new member in particular that has an agenda. Although the board had a formal orientation process for

the most recent new members, this new board member, who is also a former employee, is not letting go of that agenda.

One of our other new board members told me he said to her, "I just told her when are you going to realize that these are good people who are doing the right thing and they know what they're doing," but it's a constant and she's a former employee.

And I can get that, you know. So sometimes it's just feeling a pull and there can be dissension. It can be fine but there's not a secure feeling that all the board members are here for the same overall purpose and sometimes that's where people start and then the niche smooth out a little bit and it's like that maybe it's they're drinking the Kool-Aid, I don't know but because we don't have to agree on everything but we have to agree on our role and our mission and that's where the struggle can be. It seems like that's the hard part right now.

Mary also shared her experiences from when the board went through an exercise to look at its ends statements or board goals for the college. She felt it was another memorable experience for her while on the board because the outcomes of this enlightening process really changed the direction and focus of the college.

Maybe it's another most memorable experience or whatever on the board but there was a point after I'd been on the board for maybe three years or four years where we had a facilitator come in, really good policy governance person. We were revisiting our ends and we did this longer facilitated process. It was probably one of our better discussions as a board because it wasn't just about an agenda item but we finally kind of came around to the what are we here for? Like what are we trying to do? And that's when the economic development piece came in.

It was landmark for us. All of a sudden, we went well yeah because providing graduates career training, continuing education, retraining, even all of the cultural and, and social things that we do, recreation, all [of] that contributes to quality of life or bringing in new business or assisting businesses and startup or supporting them in retraining and if you look at our end statements, that's like right at the top which is shocking. It was shocking.

It was a big deal and that actually changed the course. It was one of those few times when we actually made a decision in line with our process that changed the way the rest of the college did their business because now they had to say how does it fit with this overarching economic development kind of goal or expectation and that was when the college really started to see that the board did not break separate from the college which is what was happening before. They were off doing their own business and the board was creating ends that fit with the business that was like a backwards system.

And so suddenly they've had changed their process and we had a really good president at the time. He was able to see it and suddenly there was a strategic plan that linked everything to one of those end statements and, and now we have a big economic development center and the small business development center is much stronger. I mean you can, you go back and pull all these things that either had been in existence in a minimal way or one you can hear that now we're here and I can tell you people in those programs will say, "We contribute to economic development because – ." We would never have said that before. So that's the strategic planning part of the board.

Mary realized that since the new board members had not had that kind of experience, they may not feel the impact they do have by establishing the direction of the college through the board ends statements. She mentioned the college was looking at its online education and one board member was particularly interested in this topic. Mary sees it as an opportunity to go through a similar process that she went through when economic development was added to the ends statements and could see discussions occurring around the topic of access, which online offerings would expand.

Online education broadens access for the whole county. So if we talk about access without having to define exactly how it's done. I hope we don't see a statement that says all programs will be offered online because you can't, I mean how would you do a culinary program online or nursing? But we have a lot of programs offered online but if we make access in a variety of ways I think that would be an opportunity for the board to feel like they're impacting what the college does and that's what those board members need. [When you are] on the board, you don't see it on a day to day basis. You see it long range but those new board members weren't a part of the board when we had that discussion. So they're not seeing what we did in that one meeting has played out through the whole college. They weren't a part of that and I think that kind of experience is what it's going to take. I mean then maybe you'll feel like you're making a difference.

Mission was an emergent theme focusing on a substantial array of subthemes, including college direction and mission, doing what is best for the college, maintaining a big picture perspective, moving the college forward, and student success and completion. As participants shared their experiences, this emergent theme was prevalent throughout the interviews.

The participants experiences related to the third superordinate theme of college commitment and engagement focused on the emergent themes of how the board functions, the

board policies, and the college's mission. These emergent themes were described in terms of the many subthemes including planning, policies and processes, policy governance, direction and mission, maintaining a big picture perspective, and moving the college forward with an overarching subtheme of student success and completion.

The participating colleges all reportedly operate under a policy governance model, however the participant's perceptions of the level the board should be involved in decisions varied. Some participants believe the board should delegate everything to the CEO and hold him or her accountable for outcomes, while others want to be more involved in making decisions that impact the college.

Community Engagement

The last superordinate theme identified was community engagement and included the emergent themes of community connections and politics. All seven participants understood their roles as elected officials and their responsibility to represent the owners or taxpayers of their respective districts.

Community Connections

Public community colleges are political subdivisions of county government in the state in which the participants were board members. Each of the community college districts are authorized by a vote of the citizens, who are ultimately the owners of the public institution. Although some of the participants came to be on the board through an appointment process, all had experienced an election cycle and had an understanding that the tax payers or citizens of the district were significant stakeholders of the college. The community connections emergent theme speaks to the linkages the board maintains with the community.

As a board member and a former employee of the college, **Lisa** received calls from the community and employees related to issues or complaints. She has worked with the board to

strengthen the board policies to ensure these issues are processed consistently because prior to her becoming a board member, there were complaints that were not dealt with properly by board members. The challenges identified in the unmanaged complaints were related to issues that resulted in some of the college's accreditation problems her college has had.

Our constituents are obviously in the political realm. We have districts, and the districts are the same as the county board of supervisors, the five districts. But from my point of view, if somebody calls or emails me from the community, I don't go, "Well, which district do you live in?" I take care of that issue. And in our bylaws, it needs to be strengthened that the chair responds for the board, because sometimes they'll do an email and do a blast to all of us. So what I've been doing as the chair is when I respond to that person, we don't copy the [whole] board because of open meeting laws, so I copy the assistant that helps the board, and I'll say, "Please send this out," so that then the board is communicated with. And when we have an executive session, if it something that can be discussed in executive session, we take care of it.

Lisa also talked about having some type of community forums in each district based on a suggestion from the CEO. The forums would provide board members an opportunity to get better acquainted with their respective constituents. She said, "What we can do is combine it with a college forum to listen to that community."

Lisa said that based on suggestions from the HLC visit, they have not started recording and streaming board meetings in the spirit of transparency. Because of the equipment required to do this, board meetings are no longer moved around the district but they have talked about having study sessions in different locations.

Because of transparency issues, one of the things that came out of the HLC is that we videotape and we live stream the board meetings. So because the equipment is all set up in the board room, it is only now at the district office. Previously, some of the CEOs used to move them around, but what we've talked about and we haven't done is having the study sessions that are not taped at the different campuses.

The study sessions do have an agenda, however they do not have a call to the public item on the agenda so she is not sure that would help the board to connect with the community in a meaningful way. Lisa said making that connection is "a hard thing."

Lisa also talked about her personal challenge of knowing the boundaries as a board member. Balancing the role of a board member working from a policy standpoint and connecting with the community on issues that are important to them is a struggle for her.

The challenges for me personally are how do I know when I'm in my role as a board member and don't step over the bounds? That to me is the hardest part because for the most part, now that I've been there on the board two and a half years, I think folks are starting to realize my role. But it's still a challenge. I wish there was an easy answer. I mean, I've attended trainings, and it's easy to say, "Well your governance policy, you're not day to day." Well, okay, I understand that. But then when do I say to a college employee, who is also a constituent, "I'll listen to you?" And what I do is, for the most part – I'll give you an example. A faculty member called me very upset about her boss, and I said, "Okay, I cannot deal. I'm sorry but in my role, I cannot deal with that, but I can help you get to the right person, the CEO, who can listen to you," and I said, "So what do you want to occur with all this?"

And told [the CEO] about it and I said, "I think we should listen to them," but when do I say, "No, I'm not going to meet with you?" Because I said to [the CEO], "Here's the thing. I want to listen," and what I did is I summarized all of the notes, and I copied [the CEO], and I said, "Okay, all these people, here's what I heard. Here are the issues. And I said them. "I'm going to do this, I'm going to copy [the CEO], so he knows what the issues are." And that worked, but then how do I know when I should say, "I'm sorry, I'm not going to meet with you at all?" Because my tendency is to want to listen, and then in a way I feel like that's my job, is to listen. So how do you know when you shouldn't?

Lisa was very challenged with this issue because she was dealing with a lot of interactions from the community based on the college's challenges with the HLC. Other participants were much more focused on interacting with constituents related to community needs and challenges with increasing taxes or raising tuition.

Stan's interactions with the community involved interacting with constituents during college and community events to see what their needs and expectations are related to the college. He perceives the college to have two primary customers – the students and the owners or county residents. For him, personally, Stan connects with the community through his other community service activities, including political party affiliations and community events. Stan said that he hopes his board can be more intentional about interacting with constituencies.

We have a customer which is the student in my mind, and then we have the owners which are the residents of the country. Um, they're the ones that put us in this position and we represent them at this table and others.

I'm active in the party so, I tend to listen to that group, but because we represent everybody, I'm out there as much as I can. And probably, one of the goals, I think that we haven't formally established, but as a board, is to be more proactive in getting in front of organizations from service clubs to political parties to make sure that what we bring to the table for discussion is what our constituencies are expecting us to bring.

Stan's board has a placeholder on meeting agendas for student government representatives to talk to the board. He also likes to connect with students by interacting with them on campuses.

Student government at each campus presents at every board meeting. And I spend a lot of time with students because I like doing it. My favorite time is to walk in to one of our student unions, and ask to sit with a bunch of them, and have a conversation.

Paul also sees the primary stakeholders to be the students and the voters. He really focuses on the student as the primary constituent.

We're there for the students and their education, which is for the good of the county. To me, the voters are secondary. I mean, if they don't like the job I'm doing, they can vote in somebody else. But I'm there to help the college.

Paul's primary interactions with students and community members are through college and community events. He is also a business person in the county, so he interacts with a lot of people through that role. His board also has student presentations at most monthly meetings and Paul thinks, "those are good. I like those. That's the funnest part of the whole board meeting." His board also moves the monthly meetings around the county, providing the board members to see different facilities and giving the community members in different areas of the county the opportunity to speak to the board during the call to the public on the agenda. His board does not get many members of the community wanting to speak to them during board meetings and he feels that is because the college is doing the right things.

Well, I think that's part of why we have meetings in different locations. But we really don't get a lot of public, you know, attending. So it's if you're doing everything right and everybody is happy, they're not going to come to your meetings. So it's when you get into trouble or mess up that they come to the meetings.

Cora feels the board's primary constituents are the students and the county citizens.

Students can speak to the board during faculty presentations and there are interactions with students during college events. Community members can present during the call to the public item on the monthly meeting agenda. Cora is very connected to the community, having lived in it for several decades. When asked how she maintains contact with the community she described different events she likes to attend that are open to the community.

Well we have quite a number of presentations, concerts and what have you that are well attended. And they have an art show regularly and I'm not even sure how many they have a year, but they're quite well attended and local artists have to agree to donate a painting – I think that was the agreement that was made, they donate a painting or a sculpture or whatever it is, their form of art, and they show their artwork for a while and it's fairly well attended. And they have a reception where the culinary people serve their goodies and so they get to show off their skills. And last night was our nurses pinning and that's one of my very favorites that I like.

Cora's board does rotate meetings to different locations in the county as well, "we have a couple of [board meetings] at each different campus and then most of them are at the big main campus."

Sara is very active in the community and talked about the primary constituents being the taxpayers and the students. She understands her role as an elected official and the need to represent the community but she is not sure that other trustees necessarily understand this component of being a board member.

[The board maintaining a healthy relationship with constituents] is a challenge. This is one of those [that] goes back to trustee education. I don't know if most trustees understand that we do represent the external population. We were elected, in my case, by a specific spot on the ground in [the] county that is the most rural and the most poor and the most disenfranchised. When I literally walk the dirt roads of [community], which is the most amazing experience, I'll knock on people's doors, do my little 30-second elevator speech, some of them don't even know that there's a college.

Sara does not feel the process of engaging with the community is standardized.

But in terms of connecting with the community getting embedded in our culture in board processes, no, this is a huge shortfall. We need to figure out some way to do it more intentionally. I'm not saying we're not doing it, all five of us, but it's not intentional and therefore we don't have a process and therefore it's not certainly standardized.

She does see that the board connects with students through their presentations at board meetings and the board hears from community members that take the opportunity to talk to the board during the call to the public item on the agenda. She talked about generally only hearing from the community when there were agenda items related to increasing taxes. Sara also sees that community engagement occurs at different community and college events, stating that it "happens at different economic forums, but it's not strategic in that we're not working any kind of questions that we could then take those same questions to a different community and then compare results."

Sara talked about a board member at another college that was unseated through the election process and thought that it may have been because he was not connected with the citizens that were voting.

And it was [board member] that got taken out by one of those agenda people. He called me the day after elections, and I was just stunned. I had no idea he even had competition. I had no idea that there was that kind of division going up – on up there between [those communities], no idea. And see, the bad news, [the board member] didn't either. So, politically, that was not well played. Yeah, so that's one of the reasons you have to remain in touch with those constituencies, absolutely.

Seth's college interacts with the community quite a bit through the call to the public agenda item on the monthly meeting agenda. They have experienced issues resulting in accreditation problems and the community became very engaged with opposition groups and media attention resulting in enrollment issues that further exacerbated the problems.

All of the problems the college had were kind of funneled and coordinated by the opposition groups and then amplified by the media and then funneled up to the HLC and they're coming down and doing an investigation, finding that there were, in fact, a lot of

weaknesses that the board was not aware of. They got us on probation. Of course, once you're on probation certain other dynamics start to go into play. Our enrollment was already dropping for demographic reasons; the number of graduates coming out of the local high schools was declining. Anyway, just because of how the population was aging, but then the bad PR certainly doesn't help and, you know, these things tend to amplify on each other.

Seth sees the “taxpayers who pay for the institution and the citizens who authorize the existence” as the primary constituents of the board. He thinks he is not like most board members that prefer to meet with groups to gauge what is going on in the community and what the community thinks about how the college is doing.

I like to meet with individuals and I like to do it random, so whenever I'm out and about and I strike up a casual conversation with somebody, inevitably college and how well we're serving or not comes up. Questions come up about whatever, but I prefer to interact with people on an individual basis because that gives me a better sense, I believe, how the community thinks than if I meet with groups, because organized groups are good at getting a lot of people to show up at a meeting.

Seth shared examples of how his board and the college has done some intentional environmental scanning through college/community events related to the college's mission. He also talked about other community groups he is involved with and that is a source for him to find out the needs of the community.

The only other community groups that I'm a member of are the party, the [state] Optics Industry Association, and the [state] Tech Council. I'm associated with all three of those. Sometimes the groups will be concerned about training for technicians or engineers or something like that. And I'll make sure that the right people are talking to each other. Sometimes that will involve me sitting in a meeting with the CEO and them or me just, you know, making sure that they're connected.

Seth indicated that the board members do attend a lot of community and college events, like chamber meetings and economic development groups, as a way of understanding what is going on in the community. He also sees students as constituents, indicating that there were non-voting student representatives on the governing board, in addition to most employee groups.

I think there is student input on the governance council, but we have mechanisms for people to deliver a lot of input. I'm not really sure how effective those mechanisms are.

That's always been one of my concerns from day one walking in the college. When people have complaints, when people have issues, when people have ideas, when people have issues with how things are run, how to do things better, how effective are the mechanisms for propagating those ideas and then action happening. And I think it's just the nature of large organizations that those mechanisms are never going to be as fast as anyone likes. And if someday we do get a mechanism that's fast, there will be a lot of people who don't like that.

Seth's board holds board meetings in a central location but has discussed moving study sessions to other sites as a way to help facilitate connections with different areas of the district.

Mary's board has a strong sense of connection with the owners of the college and maintains community connections as a priority for the board. When describing the primary roles of the board, she said there were three, including meeting the goals, hiring the CEO, and connecting with the owners.

There's a piece of meeting the goals of the college which we call ends, those larger goals, hiring and supervising and evaluating the president in her ability, and then the other piece of it is are we linking with our owners to make sure that we're going the direction that they want us to go in. That's the hardest part of the whole thing. And it's the most confusing for everyone because we never get the right input. So that combination of having an effective leader, making sure that we set the right goals and that we're monitoring how we're doing, you know, the effectiveness means that we're actually moving in that direction and then do the owners of the college agree with us, are we taking their input into consideration.

Mary talked about having specific times on their calendar to evaluate their connections with the community. They have two different retreats each year where at the first one, the board sets goals and at the second one, they monitor how the board is doing related to their goals.

In September or October, we look at our ownership linkage plan, which is our interaction with the public at that time and then typically in the, in January February timeframe, we'll do a second retreat and it's varied. Sometimes we'll do something like we did this year, we look at all the board policies or all the executive limitations which are what the president can't do and, and review whether to make changes. Sometimes it's been really focused. Last year it was focused very much on ownership linkage. That's where we came out with an annual report, with an [community] advisory committee, and an updated web site. So we set goals and then work on those during the year.

One of the challenges Mary talked about was getting the community to think like owners and providing high level feedback versus focusing on specific needs. Her board seeks feedback through focus groups on different topics and through surveys focused on the board ends statements. The also partner with staff to deliver presentations to community groups. Mary said the goals of her board's community connection initiatives were to get people to see the bigger picture versus focusing on specific classes or activities.

At the college level, it's really hard to get the owners to think like owners because they're used to thinking like customers where your stockholders don't think of the company like they're coming in to buy a widget. This is so much broader and people don't really, I think necessarily get that they are an investor. So the idea is to get that level of feedback, are you going in the right direction? And so the focus we've tried really hard to stay at that 30,000-foot level, knowing that it's going to come in saying we need more knitting classes. So what we've tried to do in recent years is to focus in on the board ends or at least the right ones. So last year we did a survey and we asked some very specific questions like these are the goals, are these the right goals and how do you feel about how we're doing in your particular geographical area?

A few questions about, about how satisfied they are with the direction the college is going and got very positive results for the most part and a pretty high turnout but we have to focus the questions very specifically. We've done things like focus groups and some of the feedback is good like we got feedback [about the] wineries starting to build up in the [area] so maybe we need more agricultural support. Because it's general enough it's not saying specific class or specific activity but more, here's where the direction we want you to go. But it almost always then ends up being you know, why did you cut the softball team or cross country team or why don't we have this or that. So [ownership linkage] is difficult. We've done presentations. We've gone out and there was a year when we had to do \$3.2 million budget cut and we went out and did presentations on that. We knew we were going to ask for a tax increase and so we were trying to prepare everyone by saying here's what's happening money-wise.

Politics

As elected officials, public community college board members are subject to political pressures from the community, particularly related to funding issues like changes to tax amounts or tuition. They are also volunteers and are able to serve a lobbying role for the college by working with state and federal legislators on issues that are relevant to their respective community college.

Lisa talked about the pressures she felt in the election process from unions associated with the college and from other community organizations with special interests. Lisa tries to understand issues from a variety of perspectives and talked about how she felt isolated at times because of the way she voted on topics. When talking about the selection of the new CEO, there were groups that did not support the current board as a whole and did not think they should be selecting the next college leader.

And I believe that he had what the college needed, and so I voted for him, and it was a unanimous vote. Well needless to say, the individuals with that [union] group were very angry with me, because how dare I go against what they say. Well, you know what I said to this group, and I've said it to other groups, I do, from my perspective, I look at all of the facts and I do what I think is best for [the] college, whether your group agrees or not.

Lisa went on to say that being a board member is hard because of the decisions you have to make. Sometimes those on the outside of the college do not understand all the details and thought processes involved in making decisions.

So, you know, I may lose a lot of friends, and later on challenges, we'll talk about that. Because that's the tough part, because we all like to be popular and make people happy. But in this role, I think I'm making more enemies than I am friends, because change is hard for people. Change is very hard.

Stan is from one of the more populated community college districts in the state that includes the state capitol and finds that politics are just part of the board's responsibility. Some of the political influences Stan experiences come from one of his colleagues having served in the state legislature. Stan is also involved in one of the main political parties so those are the circles through which he moves in the community. He was committed to his board working together in the best interests of his district and the students.

As elected officials, we are officially able to be lobbyists; however, we know that it's not in our best interest as a district for seven board members to go down with seven different attitudes on things. That's like herding cats.

Cora was originally elected to the board and went through the campaigning process, which she really disliked and it has not gotten easier even after over 30 years. She has faced well qualified opponents, including a former mayor and a former college professor. Cora has faced political pressures from the community when the college is faced with increasing taxes to the point of feeling threatened. She said that as the board chair, she has worked with the CEO to have security at the doors when there are potentially contentious issues on the agenda.

We currently have people who are very, very unhappy because they know we're planning to raise taxes and the last time that they felt we were going to raise taxes, they wrote threatening letters, obscene letters, email, made phone calls, threatening phone calls to the board members and to the president, and they're not as vocal this time, but the meeting isn't quite as near yet.

Cora is very passionate about the college and its students. She expressed many emotional examples of the pressures she has felt over the years.

One time they were going to do away with the drama program back when we had the [CEP] I spoke mostly of. The drama instructor was very bad, he really needed to be fired. He really, really did, and rather than firing him, the [CEO] decided he was going to do away with the whole drama program. It seems I'm always [board chair] when something weird is going on and I had to call a special meeting, very quickly, it was an emergency meeting, we call it because you [have] to have 24 hours if it's not an emergency. And we had well over 100 people in attendance for the emergency meeting and all of them wanted to speak and the most vocal and the one who could speak to the problem better wanted to keep speaking and she's a good friend of mine. And I told her, "[Friend], you've spoken." I said I'm sorry, you know. And my heart goes with them, but you can't decide who can speak longer, but anyhow there have been times that I have let them speak a little bit longer, whenever they are really heartfelt and it seems that uh, by and large we will keep it.

Cora feels that one of the most important her board does is attend the ACCT National Legislative Summit, "because actually something gets done." She said they used to go and meet as board members with legislators but now they take students to give firsthand accounts of how legislation impacts them and their education.

Sara's board experiences started off in a contentious way, with the board divided over the CEO hiring decision. She said, "I realized I have just walked into a real demanding

situation.” The struggles went on for about a few years and eventually one person decided not to run for re-election, so the political process took care of the challenging dynamics. Sara also talked about the challenges of campaigning and going from door to door to talk to potential voters, some of which do not even know the college exists.

Sara understands the board role is to be political at times and the need to get out into the community to help the college with initiatives. She said, “It is truly, at the end of the day, political.” Sara also talked about the need to evaluate the needs of the college and take actions that can alleviate any barriers that may exist so the college can move forward.

I think the board needs to figure out what the barriers are to moving the college forward externally, and generally that involves either straight up politics or just community presence. And in the policies, [what] we should do [is] address those barriers if the barriers are like too low property tax then we need to change that barrier so we could bring in enough revenue to move the college forward.

Seth also went through an election process when he originally became a board member and found the campaigning process to be educational and informative. He said he learned a lot about the college and the issues throughout the process. Seth also talked about the challenging decisions that board members are faced with and how difficult they are at times.

I was able to present a compelling-enough argument to get elected. I ran unopposed in 2004 because people thought I was doing approximately the right thing. I ran in 2010 and I ran hard. I had an opponent. I ran hard, but I even asked my opponent look, there are things that I know that the college is not doing well enough. Let’s raise them in the campaign, engage. I mean, beat me up on the fact that we still don’t have decent schedules and we have last-minute course cancellations. I have told other people; go ahead and make my race a referendum on the current [CEO], you know? Do it. Let’s go big. Let’s do it for real, but nobody did anything. I mean, he put up a few signs. He passed out a few flyers at a couple of events and that was it. It could have been a great opportunity; elections are the greatest opportunity to talk about the issues facing the college and to try to get a community sense of the direction we should go.

During the campaign I learned a lot from my opponent. One of the phrases in a, an editorial interview that I have plagiarized shamelessly is that college is still county’s best-kept secret, because not that many people know all of the things that we do. And if they did, I think they would be a little bit more sympathetic with us when it comes to tax time. They’re not particularly unsympathetic. I mean, so I’m probably the farthest right-most

member of the board and 14 of the 16 opportunities to vote for a tax increase I have done. I will probably do it again this year; because I think by and large we're doing the right things and moving in the right direction.

Although Seth does not shy away from the campaigning requirements of serving on the board, he prefers to meet one-on-one with people versus meeting with groups or interact with people through talk radio.

You've got to be able to be straight with people. I think most of my fellow board members do the opposite of what I do. That is, they interact with groups and I interact with individuals. I'd say 99 percent of my interaction is with individuals and then every once in a while I'll meet with a group. And I'll only do it when I'm really impressed. The other way I like to interact with the community is on the radio, talk radio. And I have a lefty host that I go to and I have a righty host that I go to. Actually I have two righty hosts and a lefty host, but neither of the righties are far righties. They're center righties and the lefty guy is a center lefty guy.

Seth was also attentive to meeting the expectations of the tax payers or owners of the college when considering how to define board effectiveness.

I thought about it quite a bit and I can give you some counter examples of how we [were not effective]. I think a lot of it revolves around our very different backgrounds and expectations of the institution and maybe somewhat differing understandings of what the board can and should do. As an elected official, I have a number of responsibilities around seeing that the resources are used wisely, sort of a fiduciary responsibility. And that also comes to setting priorities and making choices.

Mary understands the politics of being on a publically elected board, but from a somewhat different angle than other participants. In an effort to appease a vocal sector of the community, Mary's board created a location specific advisory board. It has turned into a real challenge. The intent was to create a conduit for communication but in reality, it is becoming an unwieldy group with which to work.

This new person was appointed and he said well, let's just setup an advisory committee and we'll have a vehicle to get feedback, which is great except it turned out to be the way that it was formed itself, all of the members ended up being people who were part of this little vocal minority. I wish we had handled it differently, honestly. We gave them too much freedom and so they've become a little bit of a problem now. I mean they're trying and some of them have really good intentions but the idea would be to have a regular vehicle for feedback. They meet every other week. I mean it's crazy. They've been

bringing in all of these people from the college and grilling them. I mean this is what's happening. So it has not turned out to be a nice thing. My view, my vision was like a quarterly or twice a year meeting, maybe bring in a facilitator. We [would] ask some questions and get some feedback.

I don't really have a problem with whatever feedback they want to give us, you like this, you don't like this, we need this, here's what we see happening. Even if we don't agree but it needs to be, it needs to be valuable and not a lot of picking and you know, I mean the staff members here have said, "I don't want to go back to that community." I mean they're representing the board. They're a committee of the board.

The community engagement superordinate theme included the participant's perspectives on connecting with the key constituents they serve and on the politics involved in being an elected public official. The emergent themes of community connections and politics were characterized in descriptions related to community linkages, lobbying efforts at the community, state, and national levels, and the political pressures of holding a public office.

Answering the Research Question

This chapter revealed the findings from the study in response to the research question: What are the lived experiences of public community college board members with two or more years of experience related to board effectiveness? The perspectives of participants were described within the boundaries of the four superordinate themes of personal development and engagement, board engagement, college commitment and engagement, and community engagement. The participants shared details of their respective lived experiences that culminated in their own personal growth and learning experiences that started with the process of being elected or appointed and then oriented to what being a board member was all about. The participants all recognized that board member orientation and education are important components that contribute to board effectiveness.

Participants expressed the importance of understanding the college's mission and the board's role in fulfilling that mission even in the throes of board members with personal agendas

for not in alignment with the board's responsibilities. The experience of building relationships with other board members and the CEO was also important to the board working effectively together as a team. Time spent at conferences or workshops together and having meals together also contributed to building a cohesive team focused on common.

In summary, the public community college board members that participated in this study revealed many complex lived experiences related to board effectiveness that can be categorized as difficult and challenging as well as enjoyable and rewarding. As volunteer board members, a consistent observation represented by all seven participants was their devotion and commitment to the community college for which they represented. This commitment was represented in the time they spent in their own personal development to be an effective board member, their desires to work effectively with the other members of their board and the CEO, and ultimately to their commitment to their college providing their community college districts. The participants were focused on providing educational opportunities for students, training opportunities and workforce education to strengthen the economy, and cultural opportunities that enhance the quality of life for the citizens served by their community college.

CHAPTER FIVE: SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION

The research question that directed this study was: What are the lived experiences of public community college board members with two or more years of experience related to board effectiveness? This chapter will concentrate on comparing the findings of this study with board effectiveness literature and describing conclusions and future research recommendations. The definition of board effectiveness synthesized from the literature that served as the foundation for this study was:

Board effectiveness occurs when a highly cohesive board is focused on fulfilling the mission, vision, and goals of the college and ensuring those attributes are in line with the needs of the communities served by the institution (Chait et al., 1993, 1996; Holland et al., 1989; Holland & Jackson, 1998; Smith, 2000).

Findings Related to the Literature

Prior research on the topic of higher education board effectiveness (Holland et al., 1989; Kezar, 2006) has demonstrated the importance of board members working together as a team while being focused on the organization for which they serve. Serving on an organization's board effectively also requires a commitment understanding the complexities of the organization as the board establishes future directions for the institution and a willingness to maintain healthy connections with the primary stakeholders. Both Holland et al. (1989) and Kezar (2006) studied board effectiveness using different populations. Holland et al. (1989) studied board effectiveness from an independent, private college perspective. Kezar (2006) interviewed populations with public university board expertise. Figure 3 compares the current study's findings with this literature.

Super Ordinate Theme	Emergent Theme	Holland's Six Dimensions	Kezar's Six Elements
Personal Development and Engagement	Board Education	Contextual Educational Interpersonal	Culture Education Structure
	Motivation for Serving	Interpersonal	Culture
Board Engagement	Board as a Team	Interpersonal	Leadership Culture Relationships
	CEO/Board Team		Relationships
College Commitment and Engagement	Board Function	Analytical Strategic	Leadership Education Structure
	Board Policy	Educational	Structure
	College Mission	Contextual Strategic	Leadership External Relations
Community Engagement	Community Connections	Political	External Relations
	Politics	Political	External Relations

Figure 3. Superordinate and emergent themes compared to literature
Note: The CEO/Board relationship is a unique finding when compared with the six dimensions.

Holland’s et al. (1989) Six Dimensions and the Current Study

The Holland et al. (1989) study focused on board chairs, board members, and presidents of 10 independent, private colleges. Interviews were conducted with board chairs, board members, and college presidents using a critical incident technique. Data were inductively analyzed independently by multiple members of the research team, resulting in themes being

identified. The analysis resulted in the six dimensions of board effectiveness that include contextual, educational, interpersonal, analytical, political, and strategic. The dimensions are summarized as follows:

Contextual dimension refers to the board's understanding and ability to take into account the culture, norms, and values of the organization it governs.

Educational dimension means the board takes the necessary steps to ensure that members are well informed about the organization and the professions working there, as well as the board's own roles, responsibilities, and performance.

Interpersonal dimension includes the board's efforts to nurture the development of its members as a group, attend to the board's collective welfare, and foster a sense of cohesiveness.

Analytical dimension was originally labeled the intellectual dimension but always referred to the board's recognition of the complexities and subtleties in the issues it faces, and its ability to draw on multiple perspectives to dissect complex problems and synthesize appropriate responses.

Political dimension means the board accepts as one of its primary responsibilities the need to develop and maintain healthy relationships among key constituencies.

Strategic dimension denotes the board's ability to envision and shape the institution's direction and ensure a strategic approach is used in preparation for the organization's future.

The current study examined the lived experiences of public community college board members on the topic of board effectiveness. The findings resulted in four superordinate themes including personal development and engagement, board engagement, college commitment and engagement, and community engagement. The superordinate themes suggested similarities with Holland's et al. (1989) research with multiple dimensions being represented in some of the

superordinate themes. There were also areas where the findings of the current study were different than those of Holland et al. (1989).

The first superordinate theme of personal development and engagement was summarized as the board valuing board education to understand the board's role and work to alleviate any personal or political agendas. This superordinate theme overlapped with Holland's et al. (1989) study in the three dimensions of contextual, educational, and interpersonal.

Board member education was an important component in both studies. Through board education, board members learned more about the organization for which they served and gained an understanding of their role as a board member. Board members also learned about one another as individuals and topics important to the college when board education was conducted for the entire board as a team.

A difference of the current study from the Holland et al. (1989) study was board member's motivation for serving. This was an important aspect discussed by participants in the current study. At times board members come on the board with a narrow focus or interest, not realizing the full scope of the college's mission and the board's role in upholding the college mission and future direction. According to participants from the current study, board member's motivations for serving on the board can be refocused towards the overall mission of the college. The reversal of negative impact on the board's ability to operate effectively comes from narrowly focused motives being alleviated through personal development and engagement activities such as board member education and orientation.

Board engagement, the second superordinate theme of this study, is represented in part through the interpersonal dimension of Holland's et al. (1989) findings. For boards to work effectively, they need to approach their responsibilities as a cohesive unit. This was achieved

through time spent working together towards common goals and building relationships with other board members. Study participants indicated that through relationship building activities, board members gained a deeper understanding of and respect for their fellow board members.

In the current study, the results also focused on the importance of the board having a solid relationship with the organization's CEO. This aspect was not represented in the Holland et al. (1989) findings. The CEO/board relationship may not have been as relevant based on the private college's governance approach at the time of the Holland et al. (1989) study. The policy model of governance became more defined and recognized in the mid 1990s with the CEO/board relationship is one of the major focuses in the model.

College commitment and engagement was the third superordinate theme of the current study. This superordinate theme overlapped with Holland's et al. (1989) contextual, educational, analytical, and strategic dimensions. For participants, board effectiveness was demonstrated by a commitment to the organization for which the board member served and an appreciation for the overall mission and future direction of the college. Since board members were engaged in high level decision making related to board policies the future of the college. Participants indicated it was important for board members to pay close attention to board policies, including processes used for future planning and decision making activities as they conducted their work as board members.

The fourth superordinate theme of community engagement is similar to the political dimension in the Holland et al. (1989) findings. Boards, whether elected or appointed, have a responsibility to represent the key stakeholders of the organization for which they serve. Participants felt that public community college board members need to maintain healthy connections with the community members served by the college. These community members

represent the tax payers that provide substantial funding resources to support the community college. While the board's role with regards to making decisions regarding funding is not found in the private colleges of the Holland et al. (1989) study, the participants in the Holland et al. (1989) study did address the responsibility of the private college boards needing to maintain a healthy relationship with key constituencies.

Kezar's (2006) Six Elements of High-Performing Boards and the Current Study

Kezar (2006) used a team of three researchers to conduct a study involving a group of experts on the topic of board performance in higher education. The initial sample population was selected based on having served on multiple boards or having been on a higher education board for many years. The research team then used a snowball sampling method to move from the 65 individuals originally identified to participate to the full study population of 132 individuals.

An open ended interview methodology was used to garner specialized knowledge from the participants through individual interviews. The research team then followed up with focus groups made up of university presidents, state officials, and board members that were not part of the original interview population. From the data analysis, Kezar (2006) identified and described six elements of high-performing boards. The elements, in order of importance were leadership, culture, education, external relations, relationships, and structure. Kezar (2006) described the six elements in the following terms:

Leadership involves focusing on a common vision and purpose, a multiyear agenda, asking tough questions, and the board chair and CEO leadership.

Culture includes nurturing desired qualities and building a professional, nonpartisan culture.

Education refers to board orientation, ongoing education, educational opportunities outside of board meetings, strong data support from board staff, and education evolving out of the evaluation processes.

External relations includes coordinating with legislature and governor's strategic plans, joint goal setting, sophisticated communication vehicles across layers of governance, access to the governor or important state officials, and staying on the agenda even as governor's turn over.

Relationships refer to the CEO and board chair, communication from the CEO to each board member, board members engage university constituents, and board meetings include a social aspect.

Structure involves clarifying the role of the board, developing ad hoc committees, board chair rotation, ongoing evaluation, and leading as a collective.

From the current study, the first superordinate theme of personal development and engagement involved the board valuing board education to understand the board's role and working to alleviate any negative impact from personal motivations for serving on the board. There were similarities between this superordinate theme and Kezar's (2006) elements of culture, education, and structure. The findings of both studies recognized the importance of orienting new board members in an intentional manner as well as the need for ongoing board development for the board as a whole. There were also similarities to Kezar's (2006) study in the element of culture with the first superordinate theme of personal development and engagement of the current study.

The element of culture spoke to nurturing board members to perform their responsibilities in a professional, civil way. The element of structure also overlapped with personal development and engagement through the need to ensure for board members to have an understanding of the

board's role. The elements of culture and structure from the Kezar (2006) study that overlapped with personal development and engagement could be achieved through board development activities, which was a main attribute of the first superordinate theme.

The second superordinate theme of board engagement was described by the emergent themes of the board working together as a team and the CEO/board relationship. This superordinate theme overlapped with the Kezar (2006) elements of leadership, culture, and relationships. These three elements focused on the board having a common vision and purpose, planning into the future, working together as a team, and valuing relationships with one another and the CEO. For participants, board members had a complex role in establishing the college's mission and direction.

The participants in the current study indicated a need for board members to have professional, respectful relationships as they faced challenging decisions. Strong board member relationships were also significant in the Kezar (2006) study. Because board members brought different perspectives to decisions they faced, the participants felt their decisions were stronger based on having looked at complex issues from a variety of viewpoints. Participants also valued the opportunities to build relationships with fellow board members, because it encouraged them to have a better understanding of the perspectives of fellow board members. For participants, this was particularly valuable when they did not agree on a decision they faced; however once a decision was been made, the participants agree that the board as a whole must move forward and not let differences they had inhibit their ability to function as a team. Participants in Kezar's study also expressed the importance of strong board member relationships and helped the board to work effectively together as a team.

Similarly, participants in both the Kezar and the current study described the need for a strong relationship between board members and the CEO. The volunteer, lay person board of a public college or university relied upon the CEO to bring community college leadership and operational expertise to the table when recommendations are made for board members to consider. Participants indicated that a solid relationship among these parties fostered a foundation of trust and respect from which the board and CEO could lead the institution.

College commitment and engagement was the third superordinate theme and was described in terms of how the board functions, the board's policies, and the college's mission. This superordinate theme was similar to the elements of leadership, education, external relations, and structure from Kezar's (2006) study.

Another area where Kezar's (2006) elements overlapped with attributes of this superordinate theme was planning for the future from the perspective of a common mission and vision. Participants from each of the studies indicated that as the board performed its role of planning and setting the direction for the college, it should operate from the perspective of looking at the organization from a high level with a vision beyond the next year or two. The participants of each study expressed that the board should have processes in place that support high level policy planning and decision making and, in turn, reduce tendencies to get involved in day-to-day operational and management decisions.

As publicly elected officials, participants indicated board members should take into consideration the interests of the communities served by the college. The goals set and direction established by the board should be in alignment with the community needs and culture. While both the current study and Kezar's study demonstrated the importance of community connections, the current study participants were more focused on relationships with local

community leaders and citizens versus the participants in Kezar's study that expressed the need to build strong relationships with state officials. This difference in focus is expected as the community colleges receive significant local tax support whereas public universities rely heavily on state support to fund operations and initiatives. Participants described the importance of establishing processes for the board to connect with the community citizens and by following policies related to the development of the institution's mission, vision, and goals.

The fourth superordinate theme of community engagement is described in the emergent themes of community connections and politics. This superordinate theme overlaps with the element of external relations described by Kezar (2006). While Kezar's (2006) study was focused on public universities that had a stronger connection to state government, the aspects of maintaining a connection to external stakeholders was represented in both studies. Intentional communications strategies with the owners of the institution were necessary for boards to perform at high levels. The community colleges included in the current study were much more focused on local community linkages versus the significant focus of the Kezar (2006) study on connecting with the governor's office and state legislature.

Researcher's Reflections

Of the four superordinate themes identified, the researcher was surprised by the prevalence of engagement represented in the participant's experiences when considering board effectiveness. The researcher expected a high level of interest in the college and being an active part of the community but was surprised by the pervasiveness of board members being committed to their own education related to being an effective board member. All of the participants were part of volunteer boards. Although the colleges paid most expenses related to traveling to conferences, etc., the number of hours these participants spent engaging in their role

as a board member both directly in doing the board's work and in the time spent learning about being an effective board member was awe-inspiring.

The researcher was also surprised by the openness and frankness by some of the participants to share their struggles and challenges. Some participants were dealing with significant challenges related to their college's accreditation status while others were facing challenges with new board members coming on with personal agendas and not wanting to let go of their own interests. The challenges these individuals were facing not surprising to the researcher, but the participants' willingness to be open about these struggles was surprising. Having worked at three different colleges over the last 25 years, the researcher has witnessed a variety of board dynamics perceived to be damaging not only for internal board relations but also for the college.

Some participants in this study discussed accreditation challenges related to governance and leadership, some of which was attributed to the governing board. When a public community college faces accreditation probation, many negative results can happen, including loss of credibility in the community, loss of enrollment and employees, difficulty in recruiting qualified faculty and staff, challenges with fund raising, and obtaining grant awards. Serving as a governing board is important to the success of the public community college. The role is complex and requires a motivation and commitment to the community, the college, and the students. From the researcher's perspective, the participants in this study demonstrated many qualities of board effectiveness. They were committed to their own personal development, by engaging in orientation and board education to obtain and retain best practices in boardmanship. In addition, the participants of this study were committed to working with their fellow board members and fulfilling the statutory and policy requirements of the position. The participants

were genuinely interested in the college they were elected or appointed to serve and enjoyed being part of their organizations as a board member. Finally, the participants of this study are community leaders and are committed and engaged in serving their community through their service to the public community college board.

Future Research Suggestions

There are several opportunities for future research on the topic of board effectiveness in public community colleges. This study focused on the lived experiences of seven elected public community college board members in one western state.

Further research could follow a case study approach working with all members of one board over a period of a year. This type of study would be more able to delve deeper into the experiences of the board members of the single college as they engage in various activities and govern their college. The research questions for this proposed study could be: What behaviors do board members exhibit that contributes to board effectiveness? And in what ways do board members perceive they could enhance their board's effectiveness? The study would include observations of board meetings, review of board meeting minutes, and interviews with board members over a period of time.

Another study could focus on the experiences of public community college board members who are appointed by the governor or another political body versus elected by the citizens. This proposed study could compare the findings of the experiences of appointed board members to the current study that focused on public community college board members that were elected.

Finally, another study could take a quantitative approach and conduct a survey of public community college board members on the topic of board effectiveness. The questions for the proposed study could be framed from the four superordinate themes from the current study,

Holland's et al. (1989) six dimensions of board effectiveness, and Kezar's (2006) six elements of high-performing boards. The survey instrument could be based on the frequency with which the board member experiences particular aspects of board effectiveness and their perceived importance. The Association of Community College Trustees may be a potential partner for this proposed study.

Implications for Practice

The findings of the current study have implications that surround each of the four superordinate themes. Community colleges will be well served by formalizing the board education process for board members. As new board members come on the board they may have some personal areas of interest or motivations that are not in alignment with the role of the board. Through a formal board orientation program, new board members can learn about their role, how the board works, and more about the college. Both existing and new board members can also participate in ongoing development opportunities and find ways of making contributions to students, the college, and the community through their board service.

Community college boards and CEOs need to work together as a team by building relationships with one another and with the CEO. The lay person, volunteer board in a public community college is in the position of having only one employee, the CEO; however the volunteer lay person board relies heavily on the CEO to provide leadership to the board on issues related to the college and how the board operates to move the college forward. Boards and CEOs will be well served to have retreats or works sessions that promote team building with a focus on high level planning.

The community college board should have a clear understanding of the college's mission, what the board policies are, and how the board functions. Board members should strive to work cohesively toward a common goal and focus on the big picture. The boards represented in this

study operated from a policy model of governance focusing on establishing the high level policies and the direction for the college and refraining from micromanaging the institution. In order to work effectively as a policy governance board, board members need to be trained on the tenants of policy governance and careful attention must be given to board policies, procedures, and practices.

Finally, community college board members will be well served to have an intentional approach to sustaining connections with the owners of the college also known as the tax payers. This can be accomplished through periodic focus groups with community members and surveys of citizens to inform the board on the community's needs and thoughts about the direction and goals of the college. Serving as a publically elected official is a complex responsibility that requires a commitment of time and energy. It comes with the challenges of any political office, including needing to make decisions that are not always favorable with those that voted; however, the rewards of serving as a community college board member can be seen throughout the communities served in the graduates of programs that make contributions to the everyday lives of the citizens.

Graduates of community colleges are nurses and technicians in our hospitals, mechanics in our auto dealerships, construction workers building our homes and businesses, and technology support technicians that help us buy a new computer or tablet. Community college graduates can be found working as a chef in our favorite restaurants, working in accounting services for local small businesses, and providing customer service at a variety of business we visit each day. The services of these elected officials touch the lives of thousands of degree and certificate recipients each year and the effectiveness with which they perform their duties as a board member impact the students, the college, and the community.

Conclusion

This study focused on the lived experiences of public community college board members related to board effectiveness. The intention behind this qualitative study, completed from an interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology, was to gain a deep understanding of the lived experiences of public community college board members. The study focused on the experiences of a small population of board members with between 2 and 32 years of service on a public community college board. The IPA approach is influenced by phenomenology or the study of a phenomenon and the interpretative process. A double hermeneutics process occurs where the participant interprets their own experiences and the researcher interprets the interpretations of the participant's lived experiences. Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, the researcher was gaining valuable insights into the lived experiences of the seven participants to further explore the topic of board effectiveness.

The participants' lived experiences related to board effectiveness were encompassed within four superordinate themes, including personal development and engagement, board engagement, college commitment and engagement, and community engagement. Personal development and engagement can best be described as board members valuing and engaging in board education to promote an understanding of the role of a public community college board member. Board engagement is described as board members building relationships with one another and the CEO and working together with a focus on the college's mission. College commitment and engagement is demonstrated by being committed to the college with a focus on the way the board functions and the policy decisions that focus the future direction of the college. Community engagement is described as the board embracing their role as representing the public interest in the community college and to fostering connections with the community to ensure the board understands those interests as they may change over time.

A common thread among the four superordinate themes is the term “engagement.” Effective board members must be engaged in their own personal development. They must be engaged in working with their fellow board members and with the college’s CEO. Board members must be engaged and committed to the college and its mission. And finally, board members must be engaged in the communities and with the citizens they serve.

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

<DATE>

<CEO or Board Member>

<College Name>

<Address>

Sent to email: <email address>

RE: Invitation to participate in Community College Board Effectiveness Study

Dear <Name>:

As a member of the <college> Governing Board, I am writing to invite your participation in a research study I am conducting in partial fulfillment of requirements for a Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership. My name is Wendy Davis. I currently serve as the Vice President for Human Resources at Cochise College in Cochise County, Arizona and am also a doctoral candidate at Colorado State University in the Higher Education Leadership doctoral program. I am conducting research under the direction and guidance of Sharon Anderson, Ph.D., a tenured professor at CSU, who is serving as the principal investigator for this study.

The purpose of this study is gain a deep understanding of board effectiveness in the public community college environment through an investigation of the experiences of board members who have served at least two years. There have been several studies on the topic of board effectiveness; however these studies have been conducted with populations from private, independent college, nonprofit organizations, and public four year colleges and universities. This study will be focused on public community colleges in the western United States.

We would like to invite you to participate in this study on public community college board effectiveness. A maximum of two board members from each participating college will be selected to participate in the interview process. If you decide to participate, the interview will be scheduled at a time and location convenient for you and will last not more than 90 minutes. The interview protocol that frames the interview will be provided in advance and serve as a guide for the conversation related to experiences as the board member and their individual perspectives of board effectiveness. The interviews will be digitally recorded, with your permission, and transcribed. You will be invited to review the transcribed interviews for accuracy and additional follow up may occur to ensure accuracy and clarity in the transcripts. During the data analysis process, you will also be invited to review the emerging themes identified and provide feedback.

Participation in this study is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time during the study. Strict measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality of individuals and institutions participating in the study through the use of pseudonyms. Data will be maintained in a secure location and only the principal investigator and I will have access to the raw data from the study.

Thank you for considering participation in this study and for your contributions to community colleges and our student's success. It is requested that you respond and express your intent to participate or not to participate within two weeks. If you elect to participate, I will contact you to schedule interviews at the earliest convenience.

Although there are no direct benefits to individuals participating in this study, we hope to the body of knowledge by filling the gap in the research on board effectiveness from the public community college perspective and to inform the practice of governance in public community colleges.

If you have any questions regarding the study please contact me at 520-236-4994 or at wendyfdavis@gmail.com. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please review the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board website at <http://ricro.colostate.edu/IRB/IRB.htm>.

Sincerely,

Wendy Davis
Doctoral Candidate
Colorado State University

Sharon K. Anderson, Ph.D.
Professor
Principal Investigator

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Grounding Questions

- Describe your most memorable experience as a community college board member.
- How long have you served as a board member?
- What prompted you to seek election or appointment as a board member?
- Were there specific areas of the college that interested you more than others when you first became a board member?

Effectiveness Competencies

- What does board effectiveness mean to you – how would you define board effectiveness?
- Describe how your experiences as a board member contribute to board effectiveness?
- Describe your experiences learning about the college's mission, vision, values, and culture.
- Describe the orientation activities that you participated in when you first started as a board member.
- Did all board members participate in the orientation or only those new to the board?
- Describe the CEO's participation in board member orientation activities.
- Describe the participation of the board chair in orientation activities.
- Describe other activities that you participate in that contribute to your on-going professional development as a board member, including trustee work sessions, workshops, webinars, state and national conferences.
- What activities contribute to teambuilding of the governing board?
- Do you feel your board works as a cohesive team? Why or why not?
- Describe a serious issue the board has faced. How did the board approach solving the problem? Was it successful in addressing the problem?
- Who are the primary constituencies the board serves?
- How does the board maintain a healthy relationship with these key constituencies?

- Does the board participate in strategic planning for the college? If so, how does it participate?
- What contributions has the board made in establishing the direction (mission, vision, goals) of the college?
- Is there anything we have not discussed that you feel would help me in my research study?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: *Board Member Perceptions of Board Effectiveness in Public Community Colleges: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Sharon Anderson, Ph.D., School of Education, Professor, 970-491-6861

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Gwendelyn (Wendy) Davis, School of Education, Doctoral Student, 307-851-6384

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a current board member of a public community college that has served at least two years on the governing board.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? Sharon Anderson, Ph.D. is a tenured professor in the School of Education at Colorado State University and is serving as the chair of the dissertation committee for Wendy Davis, a doctoral candidate in the higher education leadership program.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? The purpose of this study is to investigate board effectiveness in a public community college environment through the lived experiences of board members who have served at least two years on the governing board.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? You will participate in a 90 minute in-person interview, and will be invited to review the transcripts of the interview for accuracy and clarity. You will also be invited to provide feedback on the emergent themes identified in the data analysis process. Your total time commitment will be no more than 3 hours.

You will be contacted via email messages or phone call exchanges to arrange interview logistics at a place and time that is convenient for you. The interviews will be scheduled in April or May 2015.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

You will receive a copy of the interview protocol a week in advance of the scheduled interview and will be asked to respond to the open-ended interview questions and additional probing questions as appropriate during the interview. With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded. Once interviews are transcribed, you will be invited to review the transcription for accuracy and clarity. You will also be invited to provide feedback on the emergent themes identified during the analysis process.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You should only participate in this research if you are a current public community college board

member who has served at least two years. If you do not fit these characteristics, you should not participate in the study.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks or discomforts to participation in this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but we have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no direct benefits to you associated with this research, but the benefit of participating in this study is to contribute to the scholarly research on the topic of public community college board effectiveness and inform the practice of community college trusteeship.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

For this study, we will assign each participant a pseudonym so that the only place your name will appear in our records is on the consent form and in our data spreadsheet which links you to your pseudonym. Only the research team will have access to the link between you, your pseudonym, and your data. The only exceptions to this are if we are asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

Interviews will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for you, with an understanding that issues may arise that require a change of schedule. The interview will be rescheduled one time and if a participant is unable to participate in the scheduled or rescheduled interview, they may be removed from the study.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

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 about the study, you can contact the investigator, Wendy Davis at 520-236-4994. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; at 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? The researcher would like to digitally record the interview to accurately record your comments. The recordings will be shared with a professional transcriptionist. Once transcribed, the digital recordings will be maintained in a locked file cabinet accessible solely by the principal investigator for three years. Once the interview is transcribed, you will be invited to review the transcription for accuracy and clarity.

I agree to be digitally recorded for this study:

Yes

No

Please Initial _____

Please Initial _____

Please let us know if you would like your comments to remain confidential or attributed to you. Please initial next to your choice below.

- I give permission for comments I have made to be shared using my exact words and to include my (name/position/title). _____ (initials)

- You can use my data for research and publishing, but do NOT associate my (name/position/title) with direct quotes. _____ (initials)

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

CSU#: 15-5648H
APPROVED: 4/24/2015 * EXPIRES: 3/16/2016