SUSTAINING CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS: PERSPECTIVES OF
COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Improvement is essential if higher education is to survive. Expectations to demonstrate accountability and transparency, increased legislative demands, the move to performance funding, and emphases on student achievement and completion are among the numerous drivers in today's educational environment. Addressing these challenges effectively is leading many community college leaders to emphasize the importance and value of continuous quality improvement (CQI). Sustaining a culture of CQI is the foundation of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)'s Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) Pathway for Accreditation. Because of the importance of leadership commitment within any CQI plan, it follows that in order to sustain a culture of CQI in AQIP, the president must be fully committed to and engaged in the process.

The purpose of this research was to examine the individual experiences of community college presidents that may have contributed to pursuing and sustaining culture of CQI in the AQIP pathway. The problem this study addresses is that, although the AQIP pathway is intended to create opportunities for presidents to lead their respective institutions in CQI efforts, there is a lack of documented evidence to support that institutions who have presidents fully engaged in leading the program are more effective in the AQIP pathway than those who do not. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will inform and possibly improve the practices, strategies, and outcomes of presidents of colleges and universities in all accrediting bodies. Findings might be relevant but may not be generalized because the study focuses on the AQIP pathway.

This study investigates how five leaders personified these roles and how others might learn from the experiences of these leaders. Study participants are presidents of AQIP community colleges, employed by the college at least five years, and work at an institution that has participated in one reaffirmation cycle in AQIP. The findings indicate that the president's unwavering commitment and continual presence as the leader of CQI and organizational learning is undoubtedly the most significant indicator of possible success in sustaining a culture of CQI in higher education institutions.

KEY WORDS: Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), Organizational Learning, Culture, Leadership, President, AQIP

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving family.

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is a man's best friend."

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Overview

Higher education institutions are under intense scrutiny by the Education Department and legislative appointees and have been since the late 1990s. Because the cost of higher education continues to increase, and with federal student aid climbing to all-time highs, the public has demanded more accountability from regional accreditors and higher education institutions. The Spellings Commission on Higher Education expressed the concerns of many in Washington, D.C.: "A remarkable absence of accountability mechanisms… ensure that colleges succeed in educating our students" (p. vii). Since the release of the 2006 Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Congress and U.S. Department of Education have been trying to reshape accrediting organizations and their role as "gatekeepers." The 2006 report of the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Education (also known as the Spellings Report) raised concerns about academic quality in U.S. higher education:

> The commission concluded that colleges and universities must become more transparent about student success outcomes and must willingly share this information with students and families. The report called for a focus on innovation, recommending that America's colleges and universities embrace a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement by developing new pedagogies, curricula and technologies to improve learning. (Roscoe, as cited in the Spellings Report, 2006, p. 4)

According to Roscoe (2017), "The assessment movement that has emerged on American college campuses over the last twenty years emphasizes the need to carefully articulate the particular outcomes we seek for our students, and it demands that faculty and administrators provide evidence of their students' success with respect to these outcomes" (p. 1).

Another reason for the increased scrutiny is the enormous financial investment the federal

government is making to fund Title IV financial aid and to subsidize student loans. Duncan, as

cited by Anderson (2015) suggested that institutions must be held accountable when they get

paid by students and taxpayers but fail to deliver a quality education. According to the Spellings

Commission Report, "There is a remarkable shortage of clear, accessible information about

crucial aspects of American colleges and universities, from financial aid to graduation rates" (as

cited by the U.S. Department of Education, 2004 p. 4). State governments, regional accrediting

agencies, and specific program accreditation groups continue to rely on student graduation rates

and financial indicators as the key performance data to indicate success, although these measures

are no longer the most reliable indicator of student success. According to Gold and Albert

(2003), "Focusing on the college graduation rate also confuses two separate issues—the issue of

dropping out of college and the issue of simply taking a long time to get a degree" (p. 91).

September 2016 marked the tenth anniversary of the release of the Spellings Report.

According to the Neuman (2017), "The report's central theme, on target then and perhaps even

more significant now, proclaims that 'to meet the challenges of the 21st century, higher

education must change from a system primarily based on reputation to one based on

performance'" (para. 1). The Spellings Commission had hoped for federal engagement in the

assessment of the "value added" of higher education institutions; however, the proposal received

major resistance from the higher education community. Neuman (2017) suggested

> Because of the broad resistance to the Spellings Commission's call for direct federal
> engagement in the assessment of higher education outcomes, the Bush administration
> and, later, the Obama administration turned to a Plan B: working through the existing six
> primary regional higher education accreditation entities to tie the renewal of accreditation
> every five years to serious efforts on the part of colleges and universities under review to
> create and utilize meaningful learning outcomes measures. (College and learning
> outcomes section, para. 12)

Since the release of the Spellings report, efforts have been made to address the financial aid system and indicators to adequately measure student outcomes. At the 2013 Building a Grad Nation Summit, 23 participants with diverse perspectives—including students, high school counselors, collegiate financial aid advisers, researchers, business people, and leaders of both national and community-based organizations—participated in a dialogue to identify solutions to financial aid challenges. Some of the solutions identified included these: starting earlier and emphasize financing more during the college search, providing better information about college costs, emphasizing financial literacy, simplifying financial aid forms, restructuring and/or redirect federal student aid dollars, and reducing the need for remedial education (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, and Fox, 2012, p. 703). In addition, the regional accreditors have place an emphasis on prioritizing innovation and creativity as an important learning outcome for its member institutions.

Responses to a Changing Assessment Culture

Many higher education institutions have embraced opportunities for innovation, from new methods of teaching and content delivery to technological advances to meet the increasing demand for lifelong learning. Some institutions are tracking individual student performance to document evidence of student performance. These new ideas and interventions are sometimes driven by previous conversations from policy makers, yet the monetary resources to adequately fund individuals, employers, and institutions to pursue more opportunities for innovative, effective, and efficient practice are not provided. Neuman (2017) stated, "Ten years after the release of the Spellings Report, American higher education has made demonstrable progress in taking its performance more seriously" (para. 19). He continued, "In the world of accreditation

and, increasingly, in higher education administration, the message has been received and understood" (Neuman, 2017, para. 20).

In an attempt to substantially improve the access, affordability, quality of instruction, and accountability, the Spellings Commission and the Education Department pressured the regional accreditors by pronouncing that quality improvement requires a more transparent accountability and assessment, especially value-added learning assessment, and is fundamental to the improvement of quality and accountability (Neuman, 2017). Regional accreditors began to reemphasize the focus on quality assurance, evidence, and continuous quality improvement in the accreditation process to mitigate the claims that accreditation criteria and peer review practices lack rigor. Fain (2013) stated, "the common lament about higher education is that it has become more of a private good than a public one, with students as consumers and colleges as businesses focused on hawking their product" (p. 14). In 2013, Sylvia Manning, president of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), stated in an interview, describing within the updated criteria of accreditation, how higher education institutions are expected to serve the public and not themselves, "We felt it was important to make a statement—that education is a public good" (Eaton, 2003). This demand to focus on public good placed a significant challenge to community colleges to demonstrate their effectiveness. Roscoe (2017) stated, "it is time to reclaim and remake the assessment cycle of improvement in ways that will benefit our students the most" (para. 19). Roscoe (2017) continued, "it is time to embrace a paradigm of continuous quality improvement" (para. 19). The updated criteria also reestablish a focus on continuous cycles of assessing student learning and on improving retention and completion rates. The interest in greater accountability is prompting accreditors and their member institutions to reemphasize principles and practices of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).

Similarly, in the mid-1990s, external scrutiny led higher education institutions to explore engagement in the principles and practices of CQI. In the following years, Farmer and Paris (2000) suggested, "Currently, community colleges are increasing their emphasis on continuous quality improvement (CQI) as they prepare their customers for global competition in the workplace" (p. 97). CQI is the broader term of Total Quality Management (TQM); they share many similarities, including that TQM is similar to CQI in approach, emphasizing planning and implementing continuous improvements in quality. While the concepts of TQM and CQI are often thought of as the same, they, however, differ in significant ways. TQM has been as defined as "the management philosophy and system that promotes positive organizational change, as well as an effective cultural environment, for continuous improvement of all aspects of the organization" (Gift, 1992, p. 88). CQI has been defined as "a systematic approach to the measurement, evaluation, and improvement of the quality of all products and services, through the use of disciplined inquiry and teamwork" (Gift, 1992, p. 88).

TQM is a holistic management system that seeks to integrate functional areas across an organization to increase customer satisfaction and to achieve continuous improvement (Crosby, 1979; Deming, 1986; Feigenbaum, 1991; Ishikawa, 1985; Juran, 1988; Juran and Gryna, 1993). Just as the definition of quality has been a source of confusion, so has the definition of TQM. There is no consensus on what constitutes TQM. Almost every organization defines it differently or calls it something other than TQM. According to Berman and Weiler (1992), "Continuous quality improvement (also called strategic quality management or total quality management) is the successor to the quality assurance era and has been a growing movement" (p. 5).

Even though it has been debated, at its core, CQI emphasizes process improvement, stakeholder satisfaction, employee involvement, and continuously striving for improvement of

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quality. Over the years, quality has been defined in various ways. Sashkin & Kiser (1993) suggested, "Quality means that the organization's culture is defined by and supports the constant attainment of customer satisfaction through an integrated system of tools, techniques, and training" (p. 121). Sashkin & Kiser (1993) continue by stating, "A quality institution continually increases its performance level and improves its service delivery, which gives the organization credibility and ultimately benefits its stakeholders. This involves continuous improvement of organizational systems and processes, resulting in high-quality service delivery and constituent satisfaction" (p. 121).

Applying CQI to Higher Education

According to Crosby (1979), quality is considered as, "conformance to standards" (p. 15). Deming (1986) defined quality as, "a predictable degree of uniformity and dependability at low cost and suited to market" (p. 229). Juran (1988) coined the definition of quality as "fitness for use" meaning that customers or users of a product should be able to count on it for what they needed it for (p. 2). Dearing (1997) provided a definition of quality specifically for higher education that stated:

> Defining quality in higher education as meeting the needs of students does not
> necessarily imply that the student is always best placed to determine what quality is or
> whether it is present. Therefore, the question about who should define quality in higher
> education and how it should be assessed has been linked to institution that clearly states
> its mission (or purpose) and is efficient and effective in meeting the goals which it has set
> itself. (p. 12)

Woodhouse's definition allows variability in institutions, rather than forcing them to be clones of one another. For example, quality systems in higher education institutions tend to be comfortable with very different models allowing for variability. Woodhouse (1999) noted, "fitness for purpose" is a definition of quality that allows institutions to define their purpose in their mission and objectives, so 'quality' is demonstrated by achieving these" (p. 29-30). This study uses

Woodhouse's definition because of the various missions of the diverse institutions of higher education.

At the core of CQI is Deming's experimentation, using the scientific method, which is applied to everyday work to meet the needs of those served and to improve the services offered. According to Dew and Nearing (2004), "W. Edwards Deming worked with Shewhart and taught thousands in seminars on applying continuous improvement concepts through George Washington University" (p. 4). Using intricate statistical means, Shewhart tested whether variations in a process were due to randomness or were the result of a faulty process itself. Shewhart subsequently proposed to increase quality by decreasing the faulty elements of the process Bell Labs Technical Journal. These studies became the foundation of seminal works by W. E. Deming (1989, revised 1991), J. M. Juran (1988), and P. B. Crosby (1986). In 1950, Deming was invited by members of Japanese manufacturing industry to introduce the CQI concept. Originally applied in manufacturing, and later expanded to service organizations, Continuous Quality Improvement has infiltrated colleges and universities throughout the world. Dew and Nearing (2004) suggested, "Community colleges, private colleges and universities, large public universities, and regional universities began to develop approaches of continuous quality improvement that applied concepts drawn from quality discipline" (p. 3).

CQI is an approach to quality management that builds upon traditional quality assurance methods. It focuses on process rather than on the individual, it recognizes both internal and external "clients," and it promotes the need for objective data to analyze and improve processes. CQI also involves a method of evaluation that is composed of structure, process, and outcome evaluations, all of which focus on efforts to identify root causes of problems, intervening to reduce or eliminate these causes, and taking steps to correct the process. CQI recognizes that

most problems result from a failure in the *process* of providing the service, as opposed to being attributable to the providers themselves. Students, faculty, and staff could find an improved climate for learning as institutions move forward with continuous improvement efforts. Senge (1990) stressed that "The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization" (p. 4). Downey (2000) emphasized that "The search for quality in education was a reaction to the increased consumerism of students in the 1970s and their critique of the education product" (p. 3). Downey (2000) continued by stating, "The prevailing attitude of some administrators in the early 1980s was that students were to be seen, not heard" (p. 3).

This complacent attitude was an error on the part of academe, since students of the 1970s were searching for more than knowledge; they were expecting high academic marks that would get them into prestigious graduate schools that would eventually land them high-paying jobs. Such students were, however, racking up thousands of dollars in student debt, which ultimately led to external and internal pressures to graduate quickly. This push meant spending as little time as possible in college before entering the workforce. Downey (2000) suggested, "The new consumers of the education 'product' did not accept this passively as before." He continued to state, "Many 'new' students were adult returning students and had very high expectations of a 'quality' return for their investment of time and money" (p. 3).

For higher education institutions, offering a quality education became a priority, pushing the envelope for these institutions who were forced to define goals and to collect data and to use those data to make improvements. Yet quality assurance was rarely emphasized and often shunned in academic departments, where critics suggested CQI was a business and industry concept and not relevant to higher education.

The acceptance of the CQI approach to quality management has shifted over the years, particularly at institutions focusing increasingly on performance and on how well the institutions are meeting the needs of stakeholders, rather than on outputs such as standardized test scores. Others have confirmed this emphasis on organization and systems:

> Continuous improvement, sometimes called continual improvement, is the ongoing improvement of products, services or processes through incremental and breakthrough improvements. Continuous improvement is an ongoing effort to improve products, services or processes. (American Society for Quality, 2016, para. 1)

CQI and Accreditation

Accreditation is an American invention. Glidden (1998) asserted, "accreditation is a peer-review process carried out by volunteers and, at least as originally conceived, voluntary and non-governmental" (p. 2). Continuous quality improvement now assists colleges and universities across the country in maintaining accreditation criteria, standards, and federal compliance. The role of traditional accreditation in higher education has been to ensure achievement of minimum standards (McMurtrie, 2000) and to focus on the integrity of institutions' programs (CHEA, 2001). The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) defines accreditation this way:

> Accreditation in the United States is about quality assurance and quality improvement. It is a process to scrutinize higher education institutions and programs. Accreditation is private (nongovernmental) and nonprofit—an outgrowth of the higher education community and not of government. It is funded primarily by the institutions and programs that are accredited. Accreditation has a complex relationship with government, especially in relation to funding higher education. It adds value to society through assuring quality, enabling government to make sound judgments about the use of public funds, aiding the private sector in decisions about financial support and easing transfer of credit. (2015, p. 9)

Traditionally, accreditation has focused attention almost exclusively upon institutional resources and processes. It has usually been assumed that if an institution has certain resources

and uses certain processes, effective education will occur automatically. In the 1990s, federal agencies began requesting more proof of student academic achievement as part of the accreditation process. In recent years, regional accrediting bodies have emphasized accountability, transparency, and a commitment to continuous improvement, assuming this responsibility from their accrediting agency Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the U.S. Department of Education (ED). More recent criteria and requirements from accrediting agencies focus on assuring that institutions will attain and maintain educational effectiveness at both institutional and program levels. More importantly, regional accrediting bodies, such as the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), place increased emphasis for member institutions to demonstrate and provide evidence for ongoing continuous quality improvement. This represents a tremendous challenge for higher education institutions who were not ready for this type of change, especially without a well-thought out strategic plan and an academic CQI Model to follow.

The HLC's response to demonstrate quality assurance and continuous quality improvement from regional accreditation is the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP). Now named the Academic Quality Improvement Program, "AQIP launched in July 1999 with a generous grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Commission's (AQIP) infuses the principles and benefits of continuous improvement into the culture of colleges and universities by providing an alternative process through which an already-accredited institution can maintain its accreditation" (Spangehl, 2004, p. 1). The Higher Learning Commission AQIP Pathway was the first reaffirmation of accreditation process that explicitly emphasized practicing the common principles of CQI and Principles of High Performing Organizations (PHPO). The Pathway

incorporates annual AQIP Action Projects that can be found in a centralized repository, which is inclusive of a system of CQI.

The criteria used for AQIP are closely aligned with the Malcolm Baldrige criteria for Performance Excellence Program (Evans and Lindsay, 2009). According to *Principles and Categories for Improving Academic Quality* (2008 revision), "AQIP stresses that higher education institutions are the ongoing creation of the administrators, faculty, and staff that operate them—that employees, individually and collectively, hold responsibility for continuing or changing an institution's operations" (p. 3). The underpinning of the AQIP accreditation pathway is continuous improvement.

The Research Problem

AQIP and its underpinning of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) have provided higher education institutions with a proactive approach and tools to help higher education institution examine, analyze, and evaluate the key systems it uses to do its work and achieve its outcomes (*Principles and Categories for Improving Academic Quality*, 2008 revision, p. 3). Moreover, AQIP stresses that "this focus on systems—on processes, their performance results, and how an institution systematically strives to enhance both its processes and results— constitutes AQIP's method for assuring quality and stimulating organizational improvement" (*Principles and Categories for Improving Academic Quality*, 2008 revision, p. 3). AQIP and CQI offer a mechanism for building collaborative processes that could help academic and non-academic units define their unique strengths and cultivate opportunities for improvement. The AQIP framework for quality assurance and continuous improvement, derived from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program Criteria (*Academic Quality Improvement Program*, 2008;

Spangehl, 2012) paints a portrait of a rigorous and challenging practice self-assessment and external validation by peer evaluators.

For years, sustaining a culture of continuous quality improvement and documenting evidence of the efforts has been a challenge for higher education institutions, according to recent research (Park, Carver, Nordstrum, & Hironaka, 2013). More recent external demands for higher education institutions to demonstrate accountability and transparency, and to provide evidence of improvement requires a renewed focus on CQI educational leaders. Pursuing and sustaining a climate and culture of CQI is a key component of the Higher Learning Commission's AQIP pathway for accreditation. Kaye and Anderson (1998) propose, "The role of senior management ceaselessly driving the improvement cause is emphasized together with the need to focus on stakeholder requirement, measure performance, and learn from the results" (p. 1). Indeed, building a culture of evidence at a college or university is likely to take 10 to 15 years of sustained effort (Alfred and Rosevear, 2000; Morest and Jenkins, 2007).

Peer Reviewers serving as agents for the Higher Learning Commission often cite a lack of CQI structure as an opportunity for improvement in *Systems Appraisal Feedback Reports*, a key accreditation component for AQIP institutions. For example, the South Central College Systems Appraisal (2016) for a two-year comprehensive community and technical college located in southern Minnesota stated:

> There is very little evidence of data gathering which is vitally important to supporting a culture of decision making based on continuous quality improvement. SCC reports CQI processes and structures have begun to integrate with the AQIP process but shows no evidence of data gathering or reporting, even with completed AQIP projects. SCC needs to move from merely reporting its commitment to CQI to having processes, results, and improvement plans that align with the System Portfolio Categories and strategic priorities. (p. 3)

It is not uncommon for AQIP institutions that engage in self-assessment and apply the constructive approaches of CQI to grapple with the problem of sustaining a culture of continuous improvement over time. Currently, there is little research on AQIP institutions that reveals what practices, if undertaken, can enhance an institution's ability to sustain a culture of CQI.

Effective leadership in the AQIP accreditation pathway often does not come from presidents or vice presidents, but from the people in key positions throughout the college who are driven to help others and to motivate change. As Deming (2000) hints, a leader's job isn't to punish failure but to help others succeed. J. Duggar, professor of Technology and Professional Services Management, also claimed, "Leadership is helping others improve and reach their personal aspirations" (personal communication, April 2007). Anyone who is helping others succeed and improve is leading in some capacity. Whether the person is a student services staff member on the front lines offering improvement ideas to a supervisor, or a vice president who constructively helps a department achieve the institution's vision, the person is exhibiting true leadership. Maguad & Krone (2009) suggest, "Managers fail to realize that quality improvement starts with them, that they must lead by example if they have to cause others to behave differently" (p. 209). Many leaders fail to comprehend that continuous quality improvement requires a change in the behaviors, roles, and duties of every participant in the organization, especially the leadership.

Purpose of and Overview to the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of community college presidents that may have contributed to pursuing and sustaining culture of CQI in the AQIP Pathway. The study also sought description of principles, strategies, and beliefs that may have contributed to the realization of a CQI culture. For this research, CQI will be generally

defined as "the ongoing improvement of products, services, or processes through incremental and breakthrough improvements" (ASQ, 2018, p. 1).

The study participants were limited to presidents of AQIP community colleges. The researcher interviewed a purposeful sampling of five presidents, each who has experience in leading AQIP institutions. Patton's (2015) description of purposeful sampling is, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study" (p. 264). The stories and experiences shared by these presidents and the influential power they employed could influence the importance of CQI with their institutional peers. Patton (2015) stated, "Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding" (p. 264). More importantly, the study could provide opportunities for modeling behaviors, establishing practices, and setting expectations for future efforts to sustain continuous quality improvement.

The motivation for this study came as a question as to why some institutions in the AQIP pathway sustain a consistent culture of continuous quality improvement and others do not. Dialogue and observations with colleagues at the Higher Learning Commission annual conference and AQIP pathway events, as well as with HLC staff, cultivated even more questions related to systematic practices, shared beliefs, and learning organization culture between those community colleges participating in AQIP. Clearly, continuous quality improvement requires an ongoing investment of institutional time, energy, learning, and funding.

Senge's work on learning organizations serves as the theoretical framework for the study. A learning organization is a strategic commitment to capture and share learning in the organization for the benefit of individuals, teams, and the organization. Learning organization literature highlights strategic leadership for learning as the primary leader behavior required for Learning Organizations. Also, there is a strong relationship between the PHPO and Senge's Five

Principles of Learning Organizations: systems thinking, personal mastery, shared vision, team learning, and mental models. Senge (1990) defines the learning organization as "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 3).

The PHPOs and Senge's Five Principles of Learning Organizations both provide a safe place to take risks with new ideas and behaviors, and they encourage people to change traditional institutional practices and beliefs through innovation to improve their organizations. For organizations that have effectively developed a culture of CQI and built a learning organization they are recognized for their efforts, it becomes even more difficult to sustain the level of performance over time. The hypothesis of this study is that the community college president must be fully committed and non-wavering to the AQIP and CQI principles. By focusing on these presidents' experiences, the study will describe barriers and challenges, highlight key accomplishments, and organizational learning to transition the institution in pursuing and sustaining a culture of continuous quality improvement in the AQIP pathway.

Research Questions

The goal of this research project is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the beliefs held by the president regarding the Academic Quality Improvement Program?

2. What are the beliefs of the president regarding the continuous quality improvement?

3. What organizational infrastructures do presidents believe are necessary to support continuous quality improvement?

4. How do presidents define/measure a culture of continuous quality improvement? What policies and procedures do presidents believe are necessary to sustain a culture of continuous quality improvement?

5. How has the governing board been oriented to the Academic Quality Improvement Program and demonstrate support for sustaining a continuous quality improvement culture?

6. What impact does leadership turnover have on sustaining (a culture of) continuous quality improvement?

Research Method

According to Mertens (1998), "in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument for data collection" (p. 175). The qualitative research method used content analysis to analyze verbatim interview transcribed text to identify core consistencies and meanings of presidents of AQIP community colleges striving to sustain a culture of CQI. This grounded theory design and content analysis approach is based on the quantification of words in text. The researcher compared the participant's perceptions, behaviors, and strategies to determine whether shared commonalities improve the institution's ability to sustain a culture of continuous improvement. Patton (2002) stated, "Since qualitative analysts do not have statistical test to tell them when an observation or pattern is significant, they must rely first on their own judgement; second, they should take seriously the responses of those who were studied or participated in the inquiry; and third, the researcher or evaluator should consider the responses and reactions of those who read and review the results" (p. 467). According to Patton (2015), "Where all three—the qualitative analyst, those studied, and reviewers—agree, one has consensual validation of substantive significance of the findings" (p. 572-573). Qualitative analysis has no statistical significance test equivalent. The researcher is the evaluation analyst and must determine what is substantively significant. Bricki and Green (2007) suggest:

> Qualitative research is characterized by its aims, which relate to understanding some
> aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than
> numbers, as data for analysis. These can be addressed through qualitative methods such
> as interviews or focus groups. In situations where little is known, it is often better to start
> with qualitative methods (interviews, focus groups, etc.). (p. 2)

According to Merriam (2009), "Basic research is motivated by intellectual interest in a phenomenon and has as its goal the extension of knowledge" (p. 3). Another advantage of using qualitative research is that it eliminates external factors, so the findings remain reliable and unbiased.

One of the criticisms of qualitative research from those outside the field is the perception that "anything goes." However, although qualitative research cannot be subjected to the same criteria as quantitative approaches, it does provide methods of analysis that should be applied rigorously to the data. Furthermore, criteria for conducting good qualitative research, including both data collection and analysis, do exist. For example, sampling approaches differ dramatically between quantitative and qualitative methods. Patton (2015) stated, "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected for a quite specific purpose" (p. 264). Patton (2015) continued, "Quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples selected randomly" (p. 264). Patton (2015) further specifies that, "While qualitative methodologists prefer the term *purposeful sampling*, quantitative methodologists are more likely to label these strategies "nonprobability sampling," making explicit the contrast to probability sampling" (p. 265).

This qualitative research study involves invitations to purposefully sampled presidents from institutions that have cycled through at least one reaffirmation of accreditation cycle in AQIP to participate in semi-structured interviews. The researcher secured five presidents out of the 15 invited to participate. Of the 15 invited to participate, ten of the invitees did not responded to the request. This invitation to participate included a follow-up email within four weeks of the original invitation. A semi-structured interview guide with 18 questions was created to document

the presidents' perceptions and experiences, their level of commitment from senior management,

describing barriers, challenges, and highlighting key accomplishments to transitioning an

institution to develop and sustain a culture of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). A

purposeful sampling method was used to identify potential interview candidates who met the

sampling criteria determined by the researcher. The instrumentation was digitally recorded, and

interviews were professionally transcribed. The researcher coded, identified themes, and

prepared presentation of findings using NVivo 10 software.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, and because the terms related to quality may not be

familiar to all, the following quality-related terms and operational definitions were used

throughout the study.

Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP): The AQIP Pathway is one of three options
institutions have for maintaining accreditation with HLC. Like the other pathways, it is
focused on quality assurance and institutional improvement, but with an added emphasis
on helping institutions achieve continuous quality improvement. The AQIP Pathway
follows an eight-year cycle. (HLC Policy Book, 2016, 6.2-2).

Accreditation: Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities and programs
assure quality to students and the public. (CHEA, 2015, p. 2).

Action Projects: An institution on the AQIP Pathway completes an ongoing cycle of Action
Projects that over time constitute its record for quality improvement activities. To remain
aware of the institution's progress each academic year in the AQIP Pathway cycle,
institutions are required to answer a series of questions about the progress that has been
made, challenges faced, and lessons learned in carrying out their three Action Projects, as
well as their plans for advancing the projects. (Action Project Network User Guide, 2017,
p. 8).

Action Project Network: The Action Project Network is the online database listing all current
and completed Action Projects in which institutions on the Higher Learning
Commission's AQIP Pathway post on the progress and development of their quality
improvement initiatives. Institutions gain access to the network at the beginning of their
first year on the pathway. Thereafter, each institution will post at least one Action Project
Update in the network during each specified update cycle. Each update will be reviewed
by a Peer Reviewer, who will provide feedback and guidance on advancing the Action
Project. (Action Project Network User Guide, 2017, p. 2).

American Society for Quality (ASQ): A professional, not-for profit association that develops, promotes and applies quality related information and technology for the private sector, government and academia. ASQ serves more than 108,000 individuals and 1,100 corporate members in the United States and 108 other countries. (ASQ, 2018)

Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP): The Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP) was founded as the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) in 1987 as a public-private partnership designed to promote "awareness of performance excellence as an increasingly important element in U.S. competitiveness and the sharing of successful performance strategies and information on the benefits of using these strategies. (BPEP, 2016, p. 55)

Continuous Quality Improvement: The ongoing improvement of products, services or processes through incremental and breakthrough improvements. (ASQ, 2018)

Comprehensive Quality Review AQIP Pathway: Comprehensive Quality Review is required proximate to the final year of the AQIP Pathway cycle and may also occur in the fourth year based upon institutional request or a staff determination. (HLC Policy Book, 2017, p. 101)

Deming cycle: Another term for the plan-do-study-act cycle. Walter Shewhart created it (calling it the "plan-do-check-act" cycle), but W. Edwards Deming popularized it, calling it plan-do-study act. (ASQ, 2018)

Institutional Update: The institution participates in periodic evaluation through the structures and mechanisms set forth in Commission policies, submission of reports as requested by the Commission, filing of the Institutional Update, and any other requirements set forth in its policies. (HLC Policy Book, 2016, p. 83).

Organizational Learning: A learning organization does away with the mindset that it is only senior management who can and do all the thinking for an entire corporation. Learning organizations challenge all employees to tap into their inner resources and potential, in hopes that they can build their own community based on principles of liberty, humanity, and a collective will to learn. (Senge, 1990)

Quality: The degree to which a good or service meets the real, long-term needs of those for whom it was designed and to whom it was delivered determines its *quality*. (*Principles and Categories for Improving Academic Quality*, 2008, p. 19)

Quality (in an institution): "Fitness for purpose" is a definition of quality that allows institutions to define their purpose in their mission and objectives, so "quality" is demonstrated by achieving these." (Woodhouse, 1999, p. 29-30)

Quality Improvement: Providing a service that is designed to improve institutions and programs through an external review process. (Glidden, 1998)

Regional Accreditation: A collegial process of institutional self-assessment and critical peer evaluation that ensures an institution's academic program meets acceptable levels of

quality. Institutions must be accredited by a federally recognized accrediting agency to qualify for participation in federal financial aid programs that provide low cost loans to students based upon criteria established by voluntary non-governmental associates. (CHEA, 2017).

Strategy Forum: The Strategy Forum is central to the AQIP Pathway because it brings together teams from other AQIP Pathway institutions in a supportive workshop environment to generate new strategies and tactics for institutional improvement. The Forum also provides opportunities for institutional teams to give and receive constructive feedback on their quality systems as well as input on specific projects that may evolve into formal AQIP Action Projects. (www.hlcommission.org, 2017)

Systems Appraisal: A team of Commission Peer Reviewers appointed by Commission staff in accordance with team selection procedures shall conduct an analysis of the Systems Portfolio submitted by the institution and shall prepare a detailed written report. The report will outline the team's findings related to the institution's ability to meet the Criteria for Accreditation and quality expectations required for participation in the AQIP Pathway and will include any deficiencies identified for institutional follow-up by the time of the Comprehensive Quality Review in the eighth and final year of the cycle. (HLC Policy Book, 2017, p. 101)

Systems Portfolio: The Systems Portfolio is a vehicle through which the institution documents its self-evaluation of its institutional systems organized around quality principles, its meeting of the Criteria for Accreditation and its provision of distance and correspondence education, if any. An institution on the AQIP Pathway shall be required to submit a Systems Portfolio no later than Year Three of its initial AQIP cycle, and again in Year Seven prior to reaffirmation with this timeline repeating in subsequent AQIP cycles. (HLC Policy Book, 2017, p. 101)

Limitations of the Study

There are some factors that affected the findings of this study. According to Merriam (2009), "In applied fields of practice such as education, administration, health, social work, counseling, business, and so on, the most common 'type' of qualitative research is a basic, interpretive study" (p. 22). Since all qualitative research is interpretive, a "basic qualitative study" is the best plan for answering the research questions.

1. The research was limited to institutions accepted into the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) Pathway of Accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). Thus, the findings may not be replicated for institutions not participating in AQIP or four-year colleges or universities.

2. This basic study focused on the leadership perspectives of the presidents' population of AQIP institutions; thus, the researcher selected purposive sampling as a research strategy. The sample studied is not representative of the population and cannot be generalized to other populations. For this reason, the generalizability of these results is limited.

3. The research population based on the criteria has a relative small sample size. Thus, the targeted response rate was to produce reliable, valid, and relevant data for analysis. The selection of participants was not based on specific characteristics such as race, gender, or age.

4. Insider research is frequently accused of being inherently biased, as the researcher is too close to the culture under study to raise provocative questions. This study is no exception. All research will be influenced by the researcher and could be a potential bias, because of the close involvement in this community of practice.

5. The researcher acknowledges the number of participants "five" in this study may not be adequate to draw meaningful conclusions. Customarily in qualitative methods the number of participants must reach a level at which saturation of the data is achieved.

6. Another important limitation of this study relates to the researcher's exclusion of other accreditation pathways that emphasize continuous quality improvement and the decision not to consider chief executive officers from those alternative accreditation pathways. This study has not covered the full range of literature, philosophy, and guiding principles regarding continuous quality improvement.

Delimitations of the Study

Literature has revealed that certain key practices can enhance an institution's ability to

sustain a culture of CQI:

1. This research was framed to incorporate only chief executive officers as participants. While at most AQIP institutions CQI efforts are facilitated by faculty and staff members, the focus of this study was presidents of AQIP institutions.

2. The total number of community colleges selected was limited to 15 institutions, a small proportion about 10% of the total number of community colleges in the AQIP Pathway.

3. The nine-month timeframe to complete the data collection for this study was limited by program design.

Chapter Summary

Pursuing and sustaining a culture of CQI is a key component of the Higher Learning Commission's AQIP pathway of accreditation. Understanding an institution's culture is fundamental to comprehending leadership, change management, and the desire to achieve improved states of organizational performance. According to Caminiti and Sookdeo (1995), "A common misconception about the role of team leader is that it is strictly hands-off, although too little help and direction is just as paralyzing as too much" (p. 95). Cultural change can best be realized through a systematic, comprehensive, and inclusive continuous quality improvement program. This type of paradigm shift became an apparent need in higher education institutions in the early 2000s. Norris and Poulton (2010) declared, "Successful leaders use strategies to frame the need for change and to develop their organization's capacity to prosper in a changing and competitive environment" (p. 1).

According to Robbins and Finley (1995), "What is very important is that CQI may not work because leaders may be afraid to show ignorance, don't know when and when not to intervene, won't truly share, worry about giving up power, or can't get accustomed to learning on the job" (p. 4). This study attempts to capture those pervasive principles, behaviors, and tools that five presidents have attempted to utilize in pursuing and sustaining a culture of continuous quality improvement. Senge's work on learning organizations serves as the theoretical perspective for the study. According to Senge (1990), "an accurate picture of current reality is just as important as a compelling picture of a desired future" (p. 4). Therefore, Senge's five disciplines of learning organization identified in this study could be used as a pre-assessment by presidents to measure organizational preparedness for organizational learning and CQI.

According to Deming (1993), "An organization cannot sustain high-quality performance without effective leadership" (p. 53). Such leadership involves setting a vision, giving workers

necessary resources (including education), and empowering them within their areas of expertise. Understanding an institution's culture is fundamental to leadership, change management, and the desire to achieve improved states of organizational performance. The loss of time to effect immediate change can be frustrating. Institutional visions cannot be achieved without a detailed plan, and here is where the role of continuous quality improvement becomes significant. CQI supports and facilitates the implementation of visions and missions through the identification, prioritization, and execution of improvement initiatives throughout higher education communities.

The outcomes of this study have the potential to inform presidents of AQIP institutions with proven principles, behaviors, and tools for sustaining a culture of continuous quality improvement despite the limited success of higher education institutions in the past. The self-assessment process used in this study may be adapted for similar studies at other community colleges, four-year colleges or universities, and other systems of higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There are many examples in the literature of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) in business and industry, as well as efforts of CQI in higher education; however, there is very little documented literature from the leadership perspective. In this chapter, the discussion regarding literature relate to the following topics: (1) origin of continuous quality improvement (CQI), (2) Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP), (3) continuous improvement in higher education, (4) continuous improvement in community colleges, (5) the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), (6) the role of presidents in CQI, (7) commitment to CQI, and (8) learning and change. Wherever relevant and possible, the chosen literature was aligned with a focus on AQIP community colleges.

The terms used in the literature review referencing quality vary from Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA), Total Quality Management (TQM), Continuous Improvement (CI), and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), among others. The literature highlights TQM as the most widely used quality technique in higher education—perhaps because some working definitions of TQM are so broad that administrators lump any quality effort under the TQM umbrella (Sahney, Banwet, and Karunes, 2004). Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is significant component of TQM and that was the focus of this research. While TQM focuses on quality improvements in all areas of an organization, CQI may focus on improvement efforts in a single area or department (Thalner, 2005). However, all contributed to the quality assurance era

that introduced us to institutional improvement models such as the Baldrige Performance

Excellence Model (BPEM) and the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP).

The foundation of CQI is pervasive in all six regional accrediting bodies and continues to

shape the growing movement of continuous quality improvement in higher education (Berman

and Weiler, 1992). The literature on continuous quality improvement in community colleges and

it related models, such as Plan-Do-Check-Act, Total Quality Management, and Continuous

Improvement, is limited and rarely concentrates on the presidents of the community college. If

there is research related to the presidents, it typically exists on universities or higher education

institutions outside the United States. Although the research is limited in the setting of the

community colleges and the president level of leadership, the following literature review is

intended to provide a point of departure and awareness of this critical effort. The review of

literature spanned across the terminology previously mentioned; however, the emphasis of the

literature review was CQI in community colleges. There is a wealth of literature on continuous

quality improvement in higher education in general, but the review is narrowed to AQIP

community colleges. The groundwork is then laid for the basic study approach discussed in

Chapter Three.

Origin of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

The foundation of the quality improvement philosophy, known by a variety of names

such as Total Quality Management (Rudolph, 1995; Saskin & Kiser 1993), Strategic Process

Improvement (Spanbauer & Hillman, 1992), and Continuous Quality Improvement (Chambliss,

2003), is given primarily to William Edwards Deming (Walton, 1986) and is synonymous with

other terminology in literature that describes quality improvement. Deming (1986) adopted the

concept of CQI as his first quality principle by pointing out that constancy of purpose is achieved

through plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle. The PDCA, or Deming Cycle, is an iterative four-step system for the continuous improvement of processes, products, and services for continuous quality improvement. The literature of Brown and Marshall (2008) defined the four phases:

- Plan = Define purpose, goals and objectives; Collect data.

- Do = Identify needs; Propose change; Implement.

- Check = Monitor, evaluate and analyze change; Compare old and new data.

- Act = Adjust strategies for improvement; Refine and reinstitute.

Collectively, these steps encompass the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle for learning and improvement taught by Deming (1986), Brown and Marshall (2008).

The Deming Cycle provides a conceptual and practical framework while carrying out Kaizen activities by employees. Eventually, these activities described permeated to other service institutions including banking, insurance, nonprofit organizations, healthcare, government, and educational institutions. The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), one of three options institutions have for maintaining accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission, focuses on quality assurance and institutional improvement, but includes an added emphasis on helping institutions achieve continuous quality improvement.

Continuous quality improvement principles and practices that advanced from the work of Shewhart, Deming, Juran, and Crosby have resulted in many similar approaches and interpretations in higher education. Literature suggest that several authors have articulated these concepts to higher education (Banta, 1993; Burgdorf, 1992; Harris, 1992; Marchese, 1991, 1993; Teeter & Lozier, 1991; Seymour, 1993a; Sherr & Teeter, 1991). In 1998, Koch and Fisher reported that at least 160 universities in the United States reported TQM activities in 1996. In 2001, Hwarng and Teo reported 146 universities and 66 community colleges were involved in

TQM efforts. One of the most famous TQM examples in higher education involved Arthur Taylor (a former president of CBS) implementing TQM campus-wide at Muhlenburg College in 1993 (Mihaly, 1995).

CQI is not new in educational settings; however, it is usually difficult to apply these features of quality to higher education, considering the fact that quality requires teamwork (Boaden and Dale, 1992). Still, the quality of higher education is very important for its constituents. Notably, providers (funding bodies and the community at large), students, staff, and employers of graduates are important (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003). For some in higher education, the term CQI is often referred to improvement processes that gradually unfold and that do not have a predetermined end. Some community colleges have implemented CQI processes throughout their organizations.

Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP)

According to literature, one of the accountability systems used in higher education is the Malcolm Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence; the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) was developed by the Higher Learning Commission based on the education criteria for this Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award (Ballard, 2013). The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), an agency of the United States Department of Commerce, initiated the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) Program (now known as BPEP) in the late 1980s as a means of recognizing service and manufacturing organizations in the private sector (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1994). Today, the most well-known quality framework influenced by Deming, Juran, and Crosby is the criteria of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP).

As research literature reports, in 1995, the National Institute of Standards and Technology conducted a pilot in education and health care with criteria built on the seven-category framework of the Baldrige program business criteria. This was a venture with the aim of ultimately improve the quality of U.S. education. The Baldrige Criteria Commentary for Education (2016) is grounded in Seven Performance Excellence Categories and items that comprise the Baldrige quality model. Those categories are (1) leadership; (2) strategy; (3) customers; (4) measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; (5) workforce; (6) operation; and (7) results.

Research indicates that currently no studies could be found that focus on how institutions are using AQIP data to benchmark themselves against other institutions or examines how higher education institutions measure their own quality by examining the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) included in their AQIP Systems Portfolio (Ballard, 2013). According to Rice and Taylor (2003), BPEP was implemented in 15% of higher education institutions. For higher education, the Baldrige offers a number of particular benefits (Ruben, 2005a; Spangehl, 2000, 2004).

The literature notes that there have been just over 100 recipients of the Baldrige Award since its inception in 1988 (http://quality.nist.gov). In 2009, the Malcolm Baldrige Award performance excellence criteria were established for educational institutions (NIST, n.d). The official Baldrige Blog, BLOGRIGE, provides a rich amount of history and details about the award (https://www.nist.gov/ blogs/blogrige/intelligent-risk-richland-college). Wong (2011) noted that many researchers, including Beard, 2009; Eggleston, Gibbons & Vera 2007; Seymour 1993, have analyzed the improvements within educational institutions, such as Northwest Missouri State University, Richland College, and University of Wisconsin-Stout that utilized the Education Criteria for Performance Excellence. She found the Education Criteria as a useful tool

for colleges committed to continuous improvement in all areas of the organization and improving results. Wong (2011) stated, "Dr. Kay Eggleston, Richland's interim president, noted that in times of cutbacks and a difficult economy, organizations tend to become more risk averse. But those times are really when risk taking, because of its relationships to innovation and improvements in student learning, becomes critical" (para. 3).

The literature also suggests that, since the inauguration of the education category of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 1999, only three higher education institutions have won this prestigious award: in 2004, the Kenneth W. Monfort College of Business at the University of Northern Colorado; in 2005, Richland College, a community college in Dallas, Texas; and in 2001, the University of Wisconsin-Stout (http://quality.nist.gov). Other literature acknowledges that each college/university winner has used the award in marketing pieces, but no quantifiable information is available as to the impact of the award on quality (Quinn, Lemay, Larsen, & Johnson, 2009).

Research literature noted that, in 2015, Franklin had stated that "UW-Stout is an inspiring example of what is possible when systems, processes, and people are aligned around a common purpose" (p. 27). Although winning the Baldrige Award in Education provides national recognition for the institution, the primary value of the Baldrige is the framework and guidance it provides to leaders for assessing, conceptualizing, and pursuing organization performance effectiveness and excellence goals (Ruben, 2004).

Research by two highly known advocates of CQI, Furst-Bowe and Wentz (2006) examined the University of Wisconsin-Stout and how the Baldrige award has affected operations in the five years since the award (Quinn, Lemay, Larsen, & Johnson, 2009). This source, in fact, is the only available article found following up on a higher education Baldrige winner. Yet,

literally thousands of organizations have benefited from the self-assessment criteria process that the Baldrige program offers. While the Baldrige process itself likely helps institutions to focus on quality improvement, no data currently quantify its value (Quinn, Lemay, Larsen, & Johnson, 2009).

Continuous Quality Improvement in Higher Education

In the early 1990s, several universities piloted CQI efforts in non-academic units to gauge sustainability and financial costs to the institution to engage in this type of effort. Research suggests that, at the College of Business at Arizona State University, the dean introduced continuous quality improvement college-wide through an initiative involving quality principles that influenced both curricular and pedagogical revisions to active learning (Wolverton, 1994). In just a short period of time, a few faculty at the College of Engineering at Arizona State University rolled out a required freshman course on active learning, assessment, team training, and total quality management (Wolverton, 1994).

In another example, the president at Samford University was involved in their continuous quality improvement effort, the Student First Quality Quest. The literature suggests that the president at Samford defined the key concepts of Samford's quality improvement and for higher education institutions as customer orientation, constancy of purpose, continuous improvement, leadership, and statistical thinking (Chaffee and Sherr, 1992; Harris 1992). This led to Samford's CQI effort, the Student First Quality Quest, which implemented one initiative that caused transcript request time to be reduced by 85 days at the university (Harris, 1992, p. 45). The study was important because it involved faculty regularly using CQI tools such as cause-and-effect diagrams and Pareto and flow charts to diagnose curricular needs (Wolverton, 1994). Samford obtained a Fund for Improvement grant in 1990 to launch its continuous improvement initiative,

which applied continuous improvement methods to academic programs and administrative activities (Dew, 2007).

The review of the related literature includes UC-Berkley launching its first continuous improvement effort in the mid-1990s. With the assistance of the University of Wisconsin-Madison developing a four-tiered systematic approach that included these components: strategic leadership and vision, organizational assessment, process improvement, and staff engagement (Dew and Nearing, 2004). In addition, the review of literature saw other universities such as University of Michigan, University of Alabama, and Binghamton University engaged in continuous improvement in the 1990s, learning from the previously mentioned institutions (Dew and Nearing, 2004).

In her research, Freed, Klugman, and Fife (1997) reported, "The first three institutions to become thoroughly involved in the quality movement seemingly were Northwest Missouri State University in 1981, Fox Valley Technical College in 1986, and Oregon State University in 1989" (p. 28). Although these institutions are very different in mission and demographics, the one consistency between the three is that they had leadership committed to engaging in continuous quality improvement practices for the long haul. According to Tyler (1993), President Spanbauer of Fox Valley Technical College, one of the foremost leaders in implementing CQI in community colleges, realized measurable improvements in reducing the cycle time for student application processing, decreasing accidents and worker's compensation claims, and revising management performance appraisal criteria.

Literature on organizational CQI revealed that the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) focused on administrative units to determine the level of administrative coordination and support needed by these other units to be successful with CQI initiatives (Howard 1993; Dew 2000;

Tracey, 2006). The vice president for finance and administration at Oregon State University (OSU) took a similar approach seeking promising results that would lead to expanding CQI initiatives to other departments including academic areas (Tracey, 2006). Thalner (2005) in her research noted that, in 1999, Klocinski found factors that make CQI successful or unsuccessful at educational institutions are similar to those in other institutions, with leadership commitment being a key factor.

Continuous Quality Improvement in Community Colleges

Continuous quality improvement principles paved the way for the revolution and shift in culture by higher education institutions to adopt a business model and principles to improvement. The literature suggests that it was the belief of continuous quality improvement experts and advocates for 2-year and 4-year institutions to form education and training committees to develop and help implement a formal plan of education to enhance the competence of all employees in new skills related to quality Spanbauer (1989). The literature clearly suggested that in 1986, Delaware County Community College in Pennsylvania became one of the first colleges in the country to adopt a CQI process and to see beyond TQM's usefulness in manufacturing to its potential for transforming an educational environment (Munoz, 1999).

Other literature suggests that, for some higher education institutions, continuous improvement may have been initiated from a genuine concern about improving the quality of educational services (Chambliss, 2003). The literature describes other rationales for pursuing CQI. For example, in 1992, the Commission on Innovation, in a policy discussion paper, recommended to their Board of Governors that all community colleges take the necessary steps to adopt the continuous quality improvement philosophy. A review of existing literature suggests

that these practices had already made their way to highly-regarded universities. According to (Berman and Weiler, 1992):

> A pioneering group of colleges and universities in the early 1990s led the way toward quality methods in higher education. Harvard, Penn, Chicago, Carnegie Mellon, Minnesota, Maryland, Georgia Tech, Miami, Oregon State, Colorado State all have taken steps to adopt quality principles, usually known in higher education as Total Quality Management (TQM). (p. 6)

The literature also describes the efforts of the Commission on Innovation—that had consulted for the California community colleges to provide education and training for increasing numbers of diverse students, insure access for all students, and increase the retention, completion, and transfer rates of ethnic minority and low-income students—after they recommended to the Board of Governors that all California community colleges take necessary steps to adopt and implement the CQI philosophy (Berman and Weiler, 1992).

In addition, a review of literature from the late 1980s and 1990s revealed efforts of several community colleges that began developing approaches for using quality principles that fit well with their missions and emerged as innovators in the continuous quality movement (Dew and Nearing, 2004). These community colleges included Western Wisconsin Technical College (WWTC) in La Crosse, Wisconsin; Fox Valley Technical College (FVTC) in Appleton, Wisconsin; Hazard Community College in Hazard, Kentucky; Eastern Iowa Community College District in Davenport, Iowa; and Lakeshore Technical College in Cleveland, Wisconsin.

The literature suggests that WWTC pioneered many innovative approaches to continuous improvement in 1999 when they conducted a campus-wide self-assessment that positioned the college to quickly adopt AQIP in 2001 (Dew and Nearing, 2004). In 1995, Spanbauer, the president of Fox Valley Technical College, implemented a customer satisfaction system that ensured guarantees for learners, employers, and transfer institutions. Fox Valley Technical

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College (FVTC), in another example from the literature, implemented CQI into instruction by developing in-service training programs for administration, student services, and academics (Spanbauer, 1995). Fox Valley Technical College developed guidelines for excellence in instruction and curriculum. Quality tools and strategies are taught in an advanced state of training course with the expectation that faculty will use them to continuously improve the instructional process (Andrews, 1997): "The course is an interactive, collaborative seminar designed to explore competency-based curriculum development and flexible delivery techniques in the context of a quality-based institution that includes concepts of quality and common directions, customer service, team work, and problem solving for improving processes" (p. 9). Those efforts became a CQI journey that influenced a college-wide cultural change, mostly attributed to the vision and unwavering leadership of the former president of FVTC, Dr. Stanley Spanbauer (Spanbauer and Hillman, 1992).

In other literature reviewed, Hazard Community College applied the CQI process to improve the college's method for class scheduling. The scheduling process had to be improved to better meet the needs of students, faculty, and staff (Marrow, 1994). During an open session of the Academic Council in the fall of 1993, the council members decided to form a Quality Action Team that would focus on the problem of scheduling (Marrow, 1994, p. 3).

The literature confirms that Eastern Iowa Community College District, in collaboration with other higher education institutions in 1993, established the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) to assist colleges in self-assessment of their quality efforts (Dew and Nearing, 2004). The Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) began with discussions at a meeting in Los Angeles on July 26, 1991, held in conjunction with a symposium on Total Quality Management in Higher Education. The purpose of the Network would be to

have an honest and open sharing of information—the "pluses and minuses" among community college presidents who have committed to implementation of Total Quality Management principles, practices, and tools as a way of continuously improving their institutions.

The literature also suggests that Lakeshore Technical College, for example, applied the Wisconsin Forward Award in 2000 and has developed a quality-based strategic planning model (Dew and Nearing, 2004). The Wisconsin Forward Award emphasizes the understanding and application of the Baldrige criteria. Baldrige influenced the development of the accreditation process' Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) created by North Central Association (Ruben, 2004).

Research confirms that many other community colleges adopted continuous quality improvement initiatives in the late 1990s (Dew, 2007). Delaware County Community College in Media, Pennsylvania; Edison Community College in Piqua, Ohio; Savannah Technical Institute in Savannah, Georgia; Rio Salado Community College in Phoenix, Arizona; Houston Community College in Houston, Texas; Jackson College in Jackson, Michigan; Lamar Community College, in Lamar, Colorado; and dozens more were among the frontier participants in the higher education quality movement (Seymour & Collett, 1991).

Moreover, the literature reveals that Delaware County Community took another approach to incorporating continuous quality improvement into instruction by developing faculty in-service training programs. Andrews (1997) noted these programs were designed to provide in-service training, support, and facilitation of faculty teams by involving faculty in planning and evaluating TQM (as cited in Heverly, 1994; Needham, Staas, & Zilinksy, 1992). In concert with the TQM approach, in 2000, administrators at Edison Community College adopted the CQI approach to Organizational Performance Process teams that applied the Plan Do-Check-Act

cycle of quality improvement and a CQI Steering Committee monitored the results Edison State Community College (2015). During 2001, the college joined the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) and AQIP Edison State Community College (2015). In other literature reviewed, Savannah Technical Institute chose to root evaluations in a developmental framework in which fear and surprises were removed from the evaluation process and communication was expanded (Coady, Hair, & Spanbauer, 1994). Rooting evaluation in a developmental framework requires training in the underlying philosophy of the system, techniques of rating and forms completion, and the basic skills of appraisal interviewing (Centra, 1979). Edison Community College and Savannah Technical Institute focused on continuous quality improvement, systematic evaluation, and recognition of effective teaching by administration with an end goal of enhancing student learning and development (Smith and Barber, 1994).

Within the literature on organizational climate, a study described the efforts of the chancellor of the Maricopa Community College District, who, after a one-year pilot program at Rio Salado Community College, moved Maricopa into Quantum Quality in 1992. Rio Salado Community College successfully applied continuous quality improvement tools to promote understanding of the way things happen, concentrating in the areas of meeting facilitation, process definition, project selection, and data gathering and analysis (Koberna & Walter, 1993). Implementation has been most successful at Rio Salado, where there is a heavy emphasis on total quality management training for faculty and staff (Wolverton, 1994). Other campuses of the Maricopa Community College District experienced mixed levels of involvement (Wolverton, 1994). Miami-Dade Community College, a non-CQI institution, is referred to by some as an exemplar of total quality management (Wolverton, 1994). Its president-initiated, faculty-directed

Teaching/Learning Project includes a reward system that uses teaching portfolios and a professional development program structured around advancement criteria that relate to classroom effectiveness (Wolverton, 1994). Classroom assessment plays a major role in Miami-Dade's efforts to improve student learning.

The literature suggests that CQI has been applied in curriculum, teaching methods, and administrative processes in community colleges (Freed, Klugman, and Fife, 1997). Other research has studied perceptions of leadership about the impact of TQM/CQI initiatives, the role of CQI in strategic planning, and various aspects of the implementation of AQIP (Beard, 2005; Pemberton, 2005; Riccardi, 2009). Recent literature explores aspects of CQI and the interrelationship with the AQIP pathway of accreditation (Brua-Behrens, 2003; Tatro, 2007).

In dissertation research conducted by several researchers (Tranby, 2012; Lee, 2002; Rozumalski, 2002), the role of employee consensus and the initial decision-making process in an organization to embark on a quality improvement (QI) efforts, as well as the perceived and actual costs of implementing and maintaining a quality improvement (QI) or continuous improvement (CI) efforts are examined. These studies exposed the change in perspective required to profoundly shift an organizational culture of community colleges and called for presidents to study CQI principles tools and to lead such efforts (Berman and Weiler, 1992). The strength of this model is that senior leadership can generate enthusiasm, commitment to continuous quality improvement, and an orderly process of implementation which creates a sense of purpose and movement. Given the critical role of assuring quality and performance in higher education and evidence of continuous quality improvement in regional accreditation, more than 10 years after the Spellings Report and debate, there is still a lack of evidence on how leaders of institutions that participate in the AQIP Pathway have met these demands.

The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)

Literature reveals that in the early 2000s, the six regional accreditors, under pressure from the federal government and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), commenced to evaluate and rewrite their standards. Soon after the decision to rewrite the standards, McMurtrie (2000) wrote, "Critics warn, however, that removing traditional measures of quality opens the door for questionable institutions to gain accreditation, and dysfunctional ones to keep it" (p. 2). As a senior associate with the Institute for Higher Education Policy, Wellman (2000) declared, "The role of accreditors to ensure quality and accountable is being compromised" (p. B20). Wellman (2000) continued stating, "I don't know how they're going to tell the difference between the good, the bad, and the ugly, like it or not, the old standards helped accreditors reach judgments, when push came to shove, they had things that could stand up to litigation and politics" (p. B20).

According to Spangehl (2000), "Complex dynamics—including an intensifying competitive climate, galloping technological change, economic restructuring and shifting societal perceptions of the role of higher education—threaten Academia's traditional structures and standards, and require it to find new tools for managing its operations and for increasing the value a college or university can deliver to those who look to it for services" (p. 1). The Higher Learning Commission, the largest of six regional institutional accreditors in the United States, commonly known as HLC, was the leader in developing an innovative alternative accreditation models that emphasized CQI. As of 2017, the HLC accredits approximately 1,300 institutions that have a home base in one of 19 states, stretching from West Virginia to Arizona. The HLC is a private, nonprofit regional accrediting agency; its mission is "Serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning" (HLC Policy Book, 2016).

A review of the limited research literature reveals that the HLC's response to external pressures by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to ensure continuous quality improvement and accountability was the establishment of the accreditation pathway, Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), in 1999. AQIP was the leading project in the regional accreditation reform movement and modeled after the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP) (Eaton, 2001). AQIP relies, in part, on the fundamental principles of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (Biemiller, 2000; Jasinski, 1999; Eaton, 2001). Spangehl (2001) stated:

> The new model is not one that NCA's Higher Learning Commission proposes to substitute for traditional accreditation and impose on all institutions. It is an alternative designed to be so attractive that its greater benefits and reduced drawbacks will induce a significant proportion of member institutions to elect to use it, wholly or in parts, voluntarily. The AQIP model for continuing accreditation is based on an institution's systematic approach to the continuous improvement of its educational programs and supporting processes. The Commission's target is a thoughtful but swift development his alternative model. NCA senses strongly an urgency for higher education more systematically to employ quality principles. Recognizing that, for a variety of understandable reasons, academia's adoption—or adaptation—of quality principles and tools have moved slowly; the Commission is anxious to provide a means of aligning accreditation with an institution's quality initiative. To do so, NCA believes, may be a powerful tool in helping educators reap the benefits of the quality movement. (p. 3)

A pioneer of AQIP, Stephen Spangehl (2012), declared that "AQIP originated with the attempt to decrease the fundamental conflicts in traditional accreditation" (p. 2). According to Spangehl (2012), "AQIP was designed specifically to infuse a culture of continuous quality improvement into colleges and universities through processes that provide evidence for accreditation (p. 30).

As its name indicates, AQIP is designed to be a continuous learning and improvement program for participating institutions (Spangehl, 2000). Ballard (2013) stated, AQIP isolates compliance activities so institutions can complete innovative improvement action projects in an environment free from risk to their continued accreditation. Critics of AQIP and other new

models of accreditation appear resistant to engaging in a discussion about quality assurance and accreditation (Schwass, as cited by Eaton, 1999; Greenberg, 2004).

Spangehl (2012) suggests, "AQIP created a new set of analytic categories, activities, and procedures radically different from those used in traditional accreditation, inventing processes that would allow an institution to use the 'accreditation ordeal' that it was required to undergo to drive systematic process and performance improvement, which in turn would enhance the institutions success" (p. 5). Ewell (2001) suggests that, "Student learning outcomes are rapidly taking center stage as the principal gauge of higher education's effectiveness" (p. 1). Ewell (2001) goes on and states, "Accreditation organizations have responded to the growing salience of learning outcomes in a variety of ways" (p. 1). According to Schwass (2010):

> While all accrediting bodies increased their focus on outcomes, some chose to implement alternative models that focused on total quality principles. As a result, new accreditation models evolved that included quality improvement processes based on results, assessment of learning outcomes based on data, annual review (versus the single 10-year cycle), and continuous institutional accountability activities. (p. 4)

The academic literature suggests that when AQIP presented itself as a method for obtaining more timely and meaningful results from the accreditation process, Kent State University had in place the beginnings of an infrastructure to engage faculty in the necessary thinking about student learning outcomes (Gatten, 2002). Our students are our primary customers, and the intent of AQIP is to continually analyze the quality of services as efforts are made to meet and exceed student expectations. Accreditation is necessary, but accountability is critical, and promoters of this model contend that AQIP is an excellent vehicle for institutions to use to obtain accountability through accreditation (Eaton, 2003; Wellman, 2001). This unique opportunity is designed for institutions of higher education that wish to align continuous quality improvement efforts with accreditation.

Key literature and research studies that examined continuous quality improvement practices through the AQIP pathway permeates multiple systems, processes, culture, and infrastructure of higher education institutions. One of the early studies conducted on the AQIP pathway was Neefe's 2001 study to determine if colleges or universities utilizing the new alternative accreditation process demonstrated a higher level of organizational learning when compared to traditionally accredited institutions. Neefe set out to quantify, measure, and compare organizational learning maturity of 12 colleges and universities. Six of the institutions participated in the Program to Evaluate Academic Quality (PEAQ) the traditionally accreditation pathway, while the remaining six participated in the AQIP pathway. The results of the research were mixed.

Brua-Behrens (2003) study that engaged administrators, faculty, and professional staff in focus groups and interviews to determine whether AQIP focuses more on quality as compared to traditional ten-year regional accreditation activities known as the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ). The focus of Brua-Behrens study was her employer, the Eastern Iowa Community College District (EICCD), and the institution's participation in AQIP. Brua-Behrens (2003) was interested in the impact of EICCD's experience with AQIP this new modern form of accreditation designed in response to criticisms of traditional regional accreditation activities.

In a study by Bishop (2004), the efforts of understanding students' needs were examined at three AQIP accredited institutions. The qualitative study related the institution's assessment efforts to the impact on strategic planning at the institutional level and found that the planning process was improved. A study by Pemberton (2005) assessed institutional culture and climate at 62 AQIP accredited institutions; the results showed a positive impact on the organization by using management practices and accreditation based on TQM principles.

In related studies, such as Pemberton's (2005), researchers documented the measurement of organizational climate as perceived by leaders at higher education institutions participating in the Academic Quality Improvement Program. Pemberton (2005) defines organizational climate as "the characteristics of the work environment perceived by an organization's members, rather than evaluative of the underlying qualitative values, beliefs, philosophies, and customs of an organization that explain human functioning and govern behavior" (p. 50). Pemberton used an authenticated climate survey instrument to measure organizational climate factors that she cross-walked at that time to the nine AQIP Categories and principles.

LaPlante (2009) directed a study to collect and analyze data for Category 1, Helping Students Learn, as defined by AQIP, from the graduate faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The end goal was to determine if changes are needed in the graduate faculty advisor role to strengthen the University of Wisconsin-Stout's foundation. The University of Wisconsin-Stout has adapted the Academic Quality Improvement Program as a commitment to the university's continuous improvement plan that began in 1996 (Karathanos & Karathanos, 2005). The data collected from the study should determine if training or process improvement is needed for advisors (LaPlante, 2009).

Schwass (2010) conducted a study addressing the scarcity of evidence by examining the efforts of specific AQIP-affiliated institutions to collect data on the results of student learning outcome measures. Schwass' approach specifically examined student learning assessments and processes in traditional occupational programs and general education programs, at selected AQIP-affiliated community colleges or technical schools. Only two-year community and technical colleges were used because, unlike most four-year institutions, they have distinct occupational programs (Schwass, 2010).

O'Brien (2012) engaged in a qualitative multi-case study of only community colleges identified institutional structures and assessment processes that support general education learning outcomes assessment initiatives at three community colleges accredited by the Higher Learning Commission under AQIP. O'Brien's research placed emphasis on institution level and general education learning outcomes and the challenges facing community colleges around general education assessment. According to Spanbauer (1995), "Education is a service with customers like any other business, and those customer's express satisfaction and dissatisfaction about school services and instruction" (p. 522).

Tranby (2012) examined, using a phenomenological case study approach, the Riverland Community College faculty and staff perceptions of their organizational climate. The study examined the impact of the AQIP efforts from 2002-12, with an emphasis on examining the impact of the quality initiative on the college organizational climate and culture. In addition, perceptions were captured through a longitudinal analysis of an Institutional Climate Survey that was offered to all employees, and personal interviews with seventeen of the employees, ten faculty, and seven staff (Tranby, 2012).

Ballard (2013) conducted a study to identify the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to evaluate and measure the organizational performance of four-year colleges and universities that have committed to a process of continuous improvement by seeking accreditation through the AQIP pathway. Ballard focused on institutions accepted into the AQIP and identified key performance indicators through the AQIP pathway which colleges and universities use to measure the quality of their institution.

Frickx (2015) investigated the relationship between higher education institutions' continuous improvement planning processes and institutional performance measures of

graduation, transfer out and retention rates for AQIP participating institutions. Frickx' research design was a quantitative explanatory correlational study using statistical tests to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between continuous improvement culture and practices as measured by the AQIP categories and institutional effectiveness measures of graduation, transfer out, and retention rates (Frickx, 2015).

Iowa Valley Community College District, located in central Iowa, was one of the pioneer community colleges to model their upcoming NCA self-study and merge quality improvement initiatives with NCA's Baldrige Criteria-based AQIP model because both emphasize continuous quality improvement. Browne and Green (2000) suggested that the AQIP model has the potential to change institutional culture at Iowa Valley. Spangehl (2000) suggested, "AQIP will nurture a partnership with institutions that set and achieve ambitious goals for themselves and their students" (p. 2). Thus, any community college in the country that is interested in exploring the applicability of quality principles to their particular organization may apply to join the AQIP (Faulkner, 2002).

An examination of the literature found that the AQIP pathway has been researched and studied to compare accreditation pathways, improve student learning outcomes, identify student needs, improve service delivery, advance the quality of academic programming, inform change management, and impact organizational learning and other quality improvement efforts (Browne and Green, 2000; Faulkner, 2002; Dew & Nearing, 2004). However, there is very little, or possibly no, research and data regarding the role of the community college Chief Executive Officer in sustaining a culture of CQI through the AQIP pathway.

The Role of the President in CQI

Most of the literature regarding CQI initiatives in higher education are focused on initiatives in the business offices, student services delivery, or the classroom. However, very few describe the leadership actions needed and how leaders successfully pursue and sustain a culture of continuous quality improvement concepts in higher education. To truly embark on a culture of CQI, Deming (1986) stated that "Far too many leaders think their role is to hold people accountable, such thinking shows much that is wrong with those that seek simple answers instead of improvement" (p. 248). Ishikawa (1985) stated, "An organization must remove all organizational systems that create fear, such as punitive appraisal systems and merit pay" (p. 26). Further, leadership must ensure that an institution's systems and processes align with its mission and vision, making certain that the necessary resources people, policies, funds, facilities, equipment, supplies, time, energy, and other assets are allocated and used to support the overall mission and vision. The role of the leader is significant in these actions (Freed, 1997).

Deming's work is dedicated to principles of good leadership. Deming (2000) suggested, "The job of a leader is to accomplish transformation of his organization" (p. 116). Deming was suggesting that leaders support for such a cultural shift is crucial in setting expectations for others by the principles, behaviors, and practices they model. Senge (1991) summarized the role of the top leadership is often building a shared vision, empowering people and inspiring commitment, and enabling good decisions to be made through designing learning processes.

Ewell (1993) believed that any technique used in industry will be met with skepticism in higher education. Deming (1986) stated, "The first step in a company will be to provide education in leadership" (p. 116). The Malcolm Baldrige Commentary for Education criteria, like the PDCA, CQI, and TQM frameworks described earlier, emphasizes the commitment of leadership to the system. Leadership commitment at all levels allow for the articulation of a

vision and inspire a lasting commitment to improvement. The Education Criteria for

Performance Excellence starts with institutions addressing Category 1 leadership. This category

asks, "How senior leaders guide and sustain their organization, how do senior leaders' actions

build an organization that is successful now and, in the future, and how do senior leaders create a

focus on action that will achieve the organization's mission" (NIST, 2017, p. 7). In addition, the

AQIP pathway emphasizes Leading and Communicating in Category 5, asking questions such as,

"How do you make decisions in your institution? How do you use teams, task forces, groups, or

committees to recommend or make decisions, and to carry them out? And, "How do your leaders

communicate a shared mission, vision, and values that deepen and reinforce" the characteristics

of high performance organizations? (A Resource for Creating a Systems Portfolio, 2016, p. 19).

Freed et al. (1997) suggested, "A review of the leadership literature in the area of

continuous improvement advocates creative and supportive leadership" (p. 4) and details of the

ways in which a higher education leader contribute to successful implementation of CQI. Freed,

et al. (1997) also suggested, "In creating a culture that supports continuous improvement, the

themes most often espoused include: leader as teacher and coach, leader as steward, building a

shared vision, effective communication and feedback, listening, and developing a systems

orientation" (p. 131).

Sashkin and Kiser (1993) proposed that "successful leaders execute three strategic

actions to affect the culture—define a value-based organizational philosophy, create policies and

programs to support this philosophy, and model the appropriate cultural beliefs and values

through their behavior" (p. 141). They provided fascinating examples of successful (and failed)

policies, implementation strategies, and behavior models. Whereas these tools are essential,

Sashkin and Kiser (1993) pointed out, "It is the leadership that provides the essential catalyst for these elements to build a lasting CQI culture" (p. 136).

Commitment to CQI

Another factor indicating a lack of leadership support is commitment to CQI. Hogg and Hogg (1995) suggested "If that commitment does not exist, it may be inadvisable for a particular university to try CQI" (p. 42). Reuben (2007) calls for effective leadership that provides guidance and ensures a clear and shared sense of organizational mission and future vision, a commitment to continuous review and improvement of leadership practice, and social and environmental consciousness. Without demonstrating enthusiasm and commitment for the vision, leaders cannot ignite the flames of passion and energy in their followers (Koch, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Other studies have examined the impact of strategic planning, institutional effectiveness, and CQI efforts in various forms of implementation (Tranby, 2012; Riccardi, 2009). Other relevant literature (Grandzol & Gershon 1997; Kaynak 2003; Detert, Schroeder & Cudeck, 2003) has surveyed the perceptions of leadership of community colleges regarding CQI. Many academic leaders encounter challenges centered on policies, plans, programs, and practices needed for key leadership to instill shared beliefs and values among their members, all of which are crucial for CQI to thrive.

According to the literature, organizational leadership and commitment has been acknowledged as the most crucial factor between success and failure in executing CQI strategies (Entin, 1993; Melan, 1993; Seymour & Collet, 1991). In the words of Melan (1993), many failed or waning CQI initiatives are attributable to lack of management commitment. Ho and Wearn (1995) proposed that, without total dedication from the top, the chances of effective

promulgation of CQI concepts throughout the organization are unlikely. Entin's (1993) findings

about the initial use of TQM by 10 colleges and universities in the Boston area further stresses

the importance of the commitment of presidents and senior administrators:

> If TQM is to move beyond the fad stage and take firm hold... two conditions are
> necessary: college presidents must perceive TQM as a means to solve major problems
> facing their institutions; and senior academic affairs administrators and faculty must
> believe TQM is related to their concerns and interests. It may be that the schools that
> adopt TQM will be the survivors that prosper in the future. TQM is clearly about change,
> as are the forces that now buffet American higher education. (p. 31)

The appropriate level of administrative coordination and support and the need for

commitment from top management including deans, provosts, and the university president has

been well documented (Dew, 2000; Howard, 1993; Munoz, 1999). Other studies reveal that CQI

does improve organizational success and emphasize leadership commitment as crucial to

successful implementation (Kendrick,1993; General Accounting Office, 1991). Although

literature is evolving that focuses on the successes and failures of CQI, an analysis by Lozier &

Teeter (1996) suggested that improper implementation—not concepts—are to be blamed.

Engaged leadership is arguably the most important determinant of success when it comes to

creating a culture of continuous quality improvement. Thus, envisioning, communicating, and

championing intentional and meaningful initiatives in continuous quality improvement is

essential for a community college leader's success (Alfred et al., 2007).

Research has demonstrated the lack of leadership was a key reason why organizations

were incapable of maintaining CQI over the long-term (Kaye and Anderson, 1998). Other

literature found aspects that impacted successful or unsuccessful CQI efforts within higher

education institutions were like most, with leadership commitment being a key factor (Klocinski,

1999). Research conducted by George Baker (1992), a long-time community college leadership

scholar, suggested that leaders of tomorrow's community colleges must have the capacity to

implement changes and innovations of their own creation and to continue to steer toward a future

that will uphold their institution's mission, vision and values. There are various examples of

enthusiastic pledges to and levels of commitment to CQI throughout the community college

ranks. The efforts that focus on improving immediate problems erode quickly but, those that

focus on improving through a systematic process of CQI tend to be sustain because they continue

to add value to the institution (Dew and Nearing, 2004).

Learning and Change

The literature suggests that CQI depicts change, but also that learning and change are

interrelated. The hallmark of higher education institutions should be learning. Literature

produced by Senge (1990) suggests, "The organization that will truly excel in the future will be

the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all

levels in an organization" (p. 4). Learning can be defined as, according to Revans (1981), "our

ability to adapt and change with such readiness that we are seen to change" (p. 136). Tobin

(1993) stated "Organizations must learn to change and must be open to change in order to learn"

(p. 5). Learning and changing are closely related Garvin (1993) declares, "continuous

improvement requires a commitment to learning" (p. 78).

While reviewing the literature of leadership of CQI large amounts of research were found

linking CQI to learning organization. Additionally, correlations may exist among the exogenous

constructs. The linkage is supported by researched conducted by Deming (2000) who stated, "A

leader, instead of being a judge, will be a colleague, counseling and leading his people on a day-

to-day basis, learning from them and with them" (p. 117). Senge (1990a) in his literature also

stressed the advocate of learning organizations: "Leaders are responsible for building

organizations where people are continually expanding their capabilities to shape their future—

that is, leaders are responsible for learning" (p. 9). Building a learning organization is

demanding, especially when many leaders are comfortable with the status quo. But some leaders

still pursue this ideal. Senge (2010) explains their motivation:

> Some seek a better model for how to manage and lead change. Some are trying to build
> an organization's overall capacity for continual adaptation to change. All seem to believe
> that there is a way of managing and organizing work that is superior in both pragmatic
> and human terms, that significantly improves performance and creates the types of
> workplaces in which most of us would truly like to work. (p. 272)

Again, according to Senge, a learning organization is "an organization where people

continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive

patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are

continually learning how to learn together" (Senge 1990, p. 4). While there is no secret formula

to cultivate this culture, progress in Senge's five disciplines of personal mastery, mental models,

shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking moves leaders closer to their goal.

An extensive review of the literature, (Freed and Klugman, 1996) found the more

committed an organization is to learning, the more committed it is to continuous improvement.

The characterization of learning was very important in this examination of the literature for this

study. David Kolb (1984) describes learning as a process where knowledge is created through

the transformation of experience. Leaders of community colleges can institutionalize learning

through processes and procedures. The reviewed literature of AQIP and the *Principles and

Categories for Improving Academic Quality* (2008 revision) literature clearly suggested that a

universal definition for AQIP institutions:

> **Learning**. A learning-centered environment allows an institution dedicated to quality to
> develop everyone's potential talents by centering attention on learning—for students, for
> faculty and staff, and for the institution itself. By always seeking more effective ways to
> enhance student achievement through careful design and evaluation of programs, courses,
> and learning environments, both the institution and its employees demonstrate an

enthusiastic commitment to organizational and personal learning as the route to continuous improvement. Seeing itself as a set of systems that can always improve through measurement, assessment of results, and feedback, the institution designs practical means for gauging its students' and its own progress toward clearly identified objectives. Conscious of costs and waste—whether human or fiscal—leadership champions careful design and rigorous evaluation to prevent problems before they occur, and enables the institution to continuously strengthen its programs, pedagogy, personnel, and processes. (p. 4)

Garvin (1993) states, "a few farsighted executives—Ray Stata of Analog Devices, Gordon Forward of Chaparral Steel, Paul Allaire of Xerox—have recognized the link between learning and continuous improvement and have begun to refocus their companies around it" (p. 78). Then again, Senge (1990) reminds us that, "an organization's commitment to and capacity for learning can be no greater than that of its members" (p. 6). Senge (1996) later suggested, "No one can force another person to learn, especially when learning involves deep changes in beliefs and attitudes or fundamentally new ways of thinking and acting" (p. 2).

The literature describes the leadership actions needed to lead CQI efforts, but there is a void as to how one is to put these actions into practice Freed et al. (1997). To whatever degree continuous quality improvement can be sustained, it can be done various ways, but choices must be intentional, and the activity must be sustained. If "systems thinking" provides the overarching vision and theoretical foundation of the learning organization, Senge (1990b) also suggests, that learning is not possible without a notion of "agency," or a reframing of the process by which leaders lead change. Heifetz and Laurie stated:

New thinking and actions are needed to lead quality improvement efforts. A leader has to engage people in confronting the challenge, adjusting their values, changing perspectives, and learning new habits. One can lead with no more than a question in hand. Leaders do not need to know all the answers. They do need to ask the right questions. (1997, p. 134)

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Other literature suggests that the emphasis on leadership instead of traditional management changes the focus and transforms the culture of the campus (Spanbauer, 1995). Spanbauer continues and states, "Top-level buy-in and support are essential to show everyone on the campus and in the community that the administration supports the quality improvement initiative" (p. 524). Developing change champions and supporting continuous quality improvement initiatives take leadership. The leadership component of the change within an organization involves managing the vision, values and focus; and identifying customer or constituent gaps to be closed and cultivating the environment for organizational learning and innovation (Lassiter, 2007).

Spanbauer (1995), the former president of Fox Valley Technical College, stated, "The leadership styles practiced by the senior executives become the leadership model for the classroom, as professors and staff exhibit the same skills" (p. 524). This involvement and commitment are essential because continuous improvement is long range, rather than short term (Spanbauer, 1995). It is not a "let the workers do it" mentality. That mental model is not a substitute for continuous quality improvement, teamwork, and a change in the organization's belief system (Spanbauer, 1995).

Spanbauer's (1995) argument is that an important ingredient for CQI success is the commitment of the highest level of leadership. Higher education leaders and leadership systems that support a quality culture consistently model the values and behaviors that communicate to all constituents a clear and compelling vision of the future (Senge, 1990b). Freed et al. (1997) suggested, "Leaders are primary drivers of CQI, leaders develop and implement systems to integrate CQI in the culture, leaders can enhance or restrain CQI, and leaders change their style when practicing quality principles" (p. 5). These are individuals who strongly believe in change

and will promote the benefits inside the organization and "tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels" (Callery, as cited in Smith, 2001, p. 2).

A study conducted by Freed et al. (1997) found that William Troutt, president of Belmont University from 1982 to 1999, successfully led and sustained the college's continuous improvement initiatives. Trout became president of Belmont after a long and storied career by the previous president. Research from Freed et al. (1997) suggests that one thing that is a good practice for all successors is to have respect for those who came before you, whether you agree with his or her ideas, or whether the person was successful or not.

Overall, the study determined most of the actions by President Troutt are reciprocal in effect and act as a never-ending system when the actions happen consistently and regularly (Freed et al., 1997). While the goal is to sustain a culture of CQI that is tailored to the uniqueness of each community college, there are principles and characteristics that are constant and can be replicated. Thalner's (2005) research suggests, "Continuous improvement processes have had mixed results in education; however, research has indicated several factors that contribute to the perceived lack of success in the higher education environment, including faculty resistance, difficulties defining customers and quality, the lack of teamwork, the lack of appropriate data collection, and the differences in culture between education and business" (p. 40-41).

Chapter Summary

In summary, Levinson and Rosenthal (1984), as cited by Kotter (2008), end their study of presidents with the following conclusion: "strong leaders are necessary, particularly for organizations that must undergo significant change, not good managers or executives, but strong leaders" (p. 289). These assertions of leadership have been made but have not been studied in the AQIP pathway. Advocating for the building of learning organizations is the theoretical perspective

of the study and these organizations are described as places "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 1990, p. 3). CQI always takes leadership and organizational learning, so it makes sense that leadership support in the AQIP journey should be echoed throughout the college. Thus, Senge's five disciplines of learning organization identified in this study could be used as a pre-assessment by presidents to measure organizational preparedness for CQI and organizational learning.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter One stated the purpose of this qualitative basic study was to explore experiences of community college presidents that may have contributed to pursuing and sustaining a culture of CQI in the AQIP pathway. Chapter Two reviewed literature and research on the role of the leader in CQI efforts in community colleges, and Chapter Three provides the population and demographic information, timeline, setting and type of study, data collection approaches, and data analysis methods. Chapter Three will also describe the study design and rationale. Finally, ethical issues such as research biases, quality trustworthiness, and ethical considerations, will be addressed. The researcher's role will be to obtain access as well as providing protection of the participants.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study is as follows:

1. What are the beliefs held by the president regarding the Academic Quality Improvement Program?

2. What are the beliefs of the president regarding the continuous quality improvement?

3. What organizational infrastructures do presidents believe are necessary to support continuous quality improvement?

4. How do presidents define/measure a culture of continuous quality improvement? What policies and procedures do presidents believe are necessary to sustain a culture of continuous quality improvement?

5. How has the governing board been oriented to the Academic Quality Improvement Program and demonstrate support for sustaining a continuous quality improvement culture?

6. What impact does leadership turnover have on sustaining (a culture of) continuous quality improvement?

Study Participants and Demographics

The researcher used purposeful sampling for the identification and selection of information-rich cases of interview candidates. Patton (2015) suggests, "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 264). Purposeful sampling may be implemented using several different strategies. Although there are several different purposeful sampling strategies, criterion sampling was selected for this research. Patton (2002) stated, "Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance" (p. 238). Embedded in each strategy is the ability to compare, to identify similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest. According to Patton (2015), "Purposeful sampling selecting information rich cases to study, cases by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated" (p. 264). The intentions were to ensure generalizability and the knowledge gained would be representative of the sample population drawn for the study. Patton (1990) suggests, "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected for a quite specific purpose" (p. 169). By selecting a smaller number of cases, the researcher as suggested by Patton (2015), "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (p. 276).

The study participants include presidents of community college accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and in the AQIP Pathway. For the purposes of this study, regardless of their current title, the researcher will refer to the participants as presidents. Selection criteria further required that four characteristics exist for the selection of participants (1) institutions pursuing the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) pathway of accreditation, (2) the

president has been with the institution five or more years, (3) the institution has gone through at least one reaffirmation of accreditation cycle in AQIP, and (4) the education institution is a community college. For this study, there were no limitations based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or nationality because they were not relevant considerations for the research questions.

The search for participants began with the HLC's 2010-15 Annual Conference attendee lists, Institutional Status Report webpages, and the Action Project repository. The researcher used this information to identify appropriate institutions that met the criteria for the study. The participants' names, work email addresses, and phone numbers were obtained through publicly available websites. A recruitment email with a personal invitation attached (See Appendix A for study materials) was sent to the fifteen participants and six responded. Participants who responded received a follow-up email to select a date, time, and location of their interview. All participants asked that the researcher work through their administrative assistant to setup the date and time for the interview. Additionally, an informed consent form was attached to the email so that the interviewees had the opportunity to review the form prior to the interview. After 30 days, the recruitment email was resent to the nine participants who did not respond. None of the nine responded to the second recruitment email. There was no attempt to contact the nine by phone.

All five participants who agreed to interviews are either current or previous presidents of AQIP community colleges. As in many qualitative research studies, it is not unusual to perform qualitative research with only 6 to 12 participants, while for quantitative research, it is common for there to be hundreds or even thousands of participants (Madrigal and McClain, 2012). Patton (2015) stated, "Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the

available time and resources" (p. 310). Some recommendations of sample size ranges for this study, no more than four to five cases (Creswell, 2013). He suggested data collection for a few individuals. In qualitative research, it is quite difficult to determine the exact number of a sample because the analysis requires a flexible approach to arrive at a saturation point (Mason, 2010). According to Patton (2015), "There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (p. 310). Patton (2015) continues to say, "In-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information-rich" (p. 311). Finally, he states, "Small samples that are truly in-depth have provided many of the most important breakthroughs in our understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 312). For this study, the researcher's interest and interview questions seeking information-rich self-expression of experiences of the presidents served to define the sample of individuals to be studied more than to limit the inquiry about the central phenomenon. Patton (2015) suggests, "The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size" (p. 313). According to Mason (2010), "Determining your final sample size is a matter of intellectual judgement based on the logic of making meaningful comparisons, developing and testing your explanations" (p. 139). Participants and their institutions were given an alias in this study to keep their identities confidential. A list of the participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: *Study Participants*

PRESIDENT #	STUDY NAME / PSEUDONYM
1	President Brent
2	President Easter
3	President Chavez
4	President Coolidge
5	President Deere

Basic Qualitative Study Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the self-expression experiences of community college presidents that may have contributed to pursuing and sustaining a culture of CQI for their respective institutions in the AQIP pathway. The study also uncovered common themes and patterns of community college presidents that may have contributed to the realization of a CQI culture. Qualitative research methods were chosen for this basic qualitative study because the researcher was interested in understanding how "qualitative research empowers research participants to tell their stories and allow their voices to be heard" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). The choice of qualitative research method will enable the researcher to get a robust understanding of experiences shared by presidents and their importance to CQI. In addition, a goal of the researcher was "understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). The research was guided by the need to thoroughly understand the role and experiences of the president. Merriam (2009) stated, "The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (p. 14).

Also, qualitative research design is the most flexible among the experimental techniques encircling an assortment of conventional techniques and structures. As defined by Creswell (1998), qualitative research is "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem" (p. 15). Creswell continues to say, "The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (p. 15). To draw conclusions from participant's responses concerning the phenomenon of interest which is

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sustaining a culture of continuous quality improvement, in AQIP institutions, basic qualitative study methodology was appropriate. The researcher was very interested in understanding the presidents' unique experiences through their own personal stories. Merriam (2009) suggests, "basic qualitative studies are probably the most common form of qualitative research found in education" (p. 23).

The semi-structured interview questions were significant in providing data and evidence in answering the research questions. A semi-structured interview is a meeting in which the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalized list of questions. They will ask more open-ended questions, allowing for a discussion with the interviewee rather than a straightforward question and answer. However, these questions were not the only questions asked of participants, probing and follow-up questions as Merriam (2009) recommends, "allowed the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 90). The one-on-one interviews allowed for probing and follow-up questions that offered an undigested complexity of reality. Furthermore, the verbatim interviews provided rich descriptive and detailed analysis of presidents.

Data Collection Methods

All of the interviews were conducted by telephone and digitally recorded. Seidman (2013) states, "The primary method of creating text from interviews is to tape-record the interviews and to transcribe them" (p. 114). Each interview began with the researcher asking the interviewees if they had any questions about the process and the researcher confirmed the confidentiality with each participant before the interview began. Each participant participated in the interview from the comfort and quiet of the personal work office. Interviews ranged in duration from a minimum of 36 minutes, and none was longer than 98 minutes. One follow-up

call was made to one participant to member check information after the interviews were transcribed.

Data collection was expanded to include newsprint, publications, and accreditation documents as a method of triangulation. To provide background and insight, document review included the examination of accreditation feedback reports, governance board agendas and minutes of meetings, media reports and stories, and planning documents.

The higher education institutions involved in the study are required by their accreditor, the Higher Learning Commission, to document efforts of continuous quality improvement. These secondary documents provided a transparent view of the institutions' infrastructure during historical and recent time periods. The benefits of all the data collected by the researcher, as well as the potential findings, may support the hypothesis and could inform future studies.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation was sixteen in-depth open-ended interview questions including a series of predetermined probing questions relating to the president's role in sustaining a CQI culture. The first seven open-ended questions explored the culture and infrastructure the president desired to build within the institution. The second set of questions, four in total, sought to identify the credentials, skills, characteristics, traits, and qualities needed by the president to lead an AQIP institution to sustain a culture of continuous quality improvement. The final set of five questions attempted to gain further insight into the challenges, opportunities, and threats to institution as they strive to sustain a culture continuous quality improvement.

Data Analysis Methods

The semi-structured interviews were conducted by phone, voice-recorded, and transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. Fetterman (1989) uses the metaphor

"Finding your way through the forest" for data analysis in qualitative research (p. 88). The volume of data factored into the decision for the researcher to select content analysis as a data reduction effort. In some cases, qualitative content analysis attempts to generate theory. According to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), "Qualitative content analysis pays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon rather than the statistical significance of the occurrence of particular texts or concepts" (p. 2).

The analysis was conducted in two stages, from inductive to deductive. The inductive stage of analysis involved discovering patterns, themes, and categories in the data (Patton, 2015). The themes and/or categories were established through inductive content analysis. The next step was the use of deductive content analysis to investigate the themes that did not naturally fit with the established themes. In addition, the structure of analysis was operationalized based on no previous studies known to the researcher dealing with the phenomenon, and the researcher was only aware of anecdotal data that the role of the president of an AQIP institution is critical to the success of pursuing and sustaining a culture of continuous quality improvement. All the interview data were reviewed for content and coded for correspondence with the identified categories and for outlier text that could facilitate additional themes.

For this study, a model or theory on which to base inquiry was preliminary defined. An initial list of coding categories from the theory was generated and modified within the course of the analysis as new categories emerge inductively from the data. Only aspects that fit the categories of analysis were chosen from the data to be coded. According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), "coding is the process of marking segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names" (p. 534). This predefined grouping helped to determine what content would generate a list of coding schemes or NVivo Node classifications used to

categorize data into the expected thematic areas for qualitative analysis. The Node classification is either organization or person. The first reading of the data yielded categories of coding or NVivo Nodes. A second reading of the data was conducted to initiate the formal coding in a systematic way (Patton, 2015). The codes allowed for the initial analysis to be performed and scrutinizing for redundant and similar codes thereby codify the raw information appropriately to identify the norms, generate a general conclusion, and sometimes formulate a theory.

The initial categorizing steps were to identify themes according to a thematic analysis technique. Thematic analysis is a form of content analysis. Thematic analysis looks across all the data to identify main themes and commonalities. The thematic analysis occurred after the coding process as the researcher aggregated the similar codes to form major observations and themes. An instance of a theme might be expressed in a single word, a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph relevant to the research question. This approach of assignment of categories to text as the qualitative step and working through many text passages and analysis of frequencies of categories as the quantitative step.

This content analysis approach is based on the quantification of words in text. The researcher analyzed the data, individually from each participant through the basic interpretive methods described above, which allowed the researcher to bring in to focus the nature of the leader and their institution separately for ease of comparison. The researcher next step was to engage in a process of recurring regularities in the data, called "convergence," figuring out what fits together and categorizing these patterns (Patton, 2015). This iterative process was repeated for each of the participants' before being analyzed across all participants.

Chapter Summary

The goal of qualitative content analysis is to identify important themes or categories within a body of content, and to provide a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting. The use of qualitative data analysis software for data preparation, coding, and interpretation, can assist a researcher of qualitative content analysis by supporting the development of new theories and models, as well as validating existing theories and providing rich descriptions of particular settings or phenomena (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). However, the potential gain provided by using qualitative data analysis software depends on the researcher's knowledge of content analysis since it does not substitute for the researcher in the coding process.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the individual experiences of community

college presidents that may have contributed to pursuing and sustaining a culture of CQI in the

AQIP pathway. More specifically, this research may provide empirical evidence about the role of

presidents' engagement in leading the continuous quality improvement AQIP Pathway at their

institutions. The study was guided by five purposeful criteria for selecting participants:

1. The institution is in the AQIP pathway of accreditation.

2. The president's tenure at the institution is five or more years.

3. The institution participated in at least one reaffirmation of accreditation through
    AQIP.

4. The president's institution is a community college.

Fifteen email invitations were sent to potential participants, and five agreed to participate

in the study. The presidents were each assigned an alias after the interview to conceal their

identities. Chapter Three served as a guide to the qualitative study approach that focuses on the

role of the president in pursuing and sustaining a culture of continuous quality improvement. A

qualitative design was used for this study because it assisted the researcher in uncovering rich,

descriptive, and meaningful data through an interactive dialogue between the researcher and the

participants. All five participants contributed notable individual experiences regarding

continuous quality improvement, as well as providing unique perceptions pertaining to the

process of pursuing and sustaining a culture of CQI in their community college.

The study is significant because it contributes to the lack of documented evidence to support that AQIP pathway institutions' presidents who fully engaged in leading the program are more effective in AQIP than those institutions whose presidents do not. In addition, the study adds to the general knowledge about the implementation efforts of CQI. According to a Higher Learning Commission (HLC) staff member, institutions in the AQIP pathway may approach continuous quality improvement in different ways but, one element of consistency is essential: "persistent engagement of the leader" (Eric Martin, personal communication, April 25, 2017). This statement suggests that community college leaders are an integral part of being successful in the AQIP pathway. Qualitative data were collected from five interview participants with direct knowledge of AQIP and CQI principles as presidents of community colleges. All five participants indicated that resistance to change and CQI were influences on pursuing and sustaining a culture of CQI through the AQIP pathway.

The following sections focus on the review of each theme aggregated across all five participants to identify areas of comparison and contrast. The researcher sought to answer the primary question: What is the role of the president in pursuing and sustaining CQI through the AQIP pathway? A breakdown of institutional characteristics is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: *Institutional Characteristics of the Study Participants' Institution* *

	1	2	3	4	5
Location	Midwest	Midwest	Mid-South	Southwest	Mid-Plains
Type / Campus Setting	Rural: Fringe	City: Small	Town: Remote	Rural: Fringe	Town: Distant
Total Enrollment Headcount, 2015-16	4,422	9,830	2,290	3,246	13,038
Enrollment percentage by ethnicity					
White	82%	69%	89%	38%	65%
Hispanic	3	3	6	52	12
Black	3	3		2	8
American Indian/ Alaska Native	2	2	1	1	1
Unknown	7	1	-	4	1
Non-resident Alien	3	-	-	1	2
Asian	-	-	-	-	5
Two or more races	-	-	4	1	-

All represented institutions were 2-year public community colleges, granting associates degrees and certificates.

Research Findings: President Perspectives

CQI and Compliance

The Higher Learning Commission designed AQIP to provide its institutions with a more meaningful and intentional opportunity to engage in CQI. However, there are some requirements that focus on standards to meet institutional and federal compliance in addition to opportunities to engage in CQI. When asked, "What are the beliefs held by presidents regarding the Academic Quality Improvement Program?" all five presidents reported differentiating between compliance and AQIP for their constituencies. All five participants were motivated by the desire to align AQIP throughout the institution to pursue CQI. All stated that there is a delicate balance needed when presidents are setting expectations of meeting compliance requirements as opposed to pursuing CQI through AQIP.

When asked, "What are the beliefs held by presidents regarding the Continuous Quality

Improvement?" all five presidents believed that CQI is the underpinning of AQIP and

compliance is something that must be done throughout the institution. Furthermore, all

presidents shared the perspective that compliance requirements are fulfilled if their college is

pursuing CQI through the various components of AQIP.

Presidents Brent, Easter, and Chavez articulated that they have explicitly talked about

and differentiated between compliance and CQI with their internal constituents. Brent, who

leads a small, rural community college, noted the many compliance requirements of today

higher education institutions as well:

> There are so many compliance requirements. You know, I think we would automatically think about civil rights or Title IX, Clery Act or Title IV for financial aid. Compliance in terms of water quality is an initiative and basic security and whether that's internal or external there are lots of compliance issues across the college.

Brent acknowledged that AQIP incorporates the many compliance requirements for the college.

She perceives the college handling AQIP distinctly from other types of compliance. Brent

further explained, "People understand those are compliance issues; those are not the large,

strategic quality initiatives. They are sort of the must-haves." Brent acknowledged:

> We have differentiated between compliance and improvement – a lot, I think everybody knows where we're headed on all the quality initiatives. She further stated, we have been explicit about talking both about the Aspen Award and the Baldrige Award. We couldn't be non-compliant with HLC; we couldn't be noncompliant with the Board of Regents. But that only got us to the basics. If we really wanted to be a great institution and if we wanted better tomorrows, then we work today. We had to change the culture. We needed to focus on continuous quality improvement. We tried to explain how people understand and build at critical mass that compliance is the baseline.

 Easter also noted:

> I began to become a little impatient because it seemed to me we were moving too slowly, and I made the decision probably a year and a half into our own work of continuous improvement to use AQIP as the means to help us build that foundation. So, we applied to be an AQIP school. We were accepted. We sent a team of 12 or 14 to the AQIP training session and that team included faculty, staff, mid-level management, senior management, and a board member.

Chavez also discussed the emphasis of continuous quality improvement over compliance:

> I think too many people look at accreditation, and says, "Oh man, here's this accreditation agency, they're out to get me."

He went on to say:

> But how can you make this better for the institution in terms of starting and becoming involved in quality initiatives, that's how I approached it.

President Chavez expressed that compliance is an issue that he thinks about, but he

particularly stressed:

> Well, I think the compliance part is just the starting part. You know, what I do is say what are the minimums? I mean, what do you have to do in terms of meeting HLC credentials? I'm a peer evaluator too. What do you have to do? But that is just the starting point. Then, okay, so if that's your starting point now, where do you go from there to make sure you go well beyond it? Don't be satisfied with just the minimum standards.

> Chavez believes that through external assessment, identification of areas of

improvement by Peer Reviewers who conduct accreditation evaluations, and the completion of

CQI initiatives to address those areas of improvement, institutions get better. Two presidents,

Coolidge and Deere, described their perceptions of compliance and CQI in a very similar way in

that they are interconnected. Coolidge declared:

> So, I think compliance and continuous improvement can be interconnected when you look at the process for ensuring compliance. You know, I see some connection between compliance and improvement. But there is some distinction and I think you must—so for instance, compliance. I believe you should have a systematic process for everything.

Deere echoed similar sentiments:

> First, compliance for us is more about simply reporting data that we already collect. For me, it's a very one-dimensional thing. The compliance part of the data that we report, it really is simple. The quality improvement part talks about how we do things and making certain that when we address issues and initiatives that we have here at the college, that we do it in a continuous quality kind of way.

> The presidents' comments about compliance should not come as a surprise as

compliance requirements exist in all pathways of accreditation. However, AQIP extends its institutions well beyond the threshold of compliance with the expectations of practicing the principles of CQI. For the benefit of their constituents, all five participants were passionate about differentiating between CQI and compliance. By contrast, two reported an emerging need of the president to communicate that the institution's commitment to AQIP represents a commitment to CQI and compliance. Two participants identified leveraging accreditation requirements as a strategy.

By contrast, all five presidents expressed that the underpinnings of AQIP is continuous quality improvement—and not compliance. All participants emphasized that they worked towards continuous quality improvement becoming the focus, rather than just compliance reporting and reaffirmation of accreditation. In addition, all five noted maintaining consistent involvement in CQI is difficult to do. By contrast, three presidents did comment that compliance components were used as leverage to encourage continuous quality improvement. Therefore, it raises the issue of whether compliance and the heavy-handed approach have a negative impact on some institutions ability to engage in practicing the common Principles of High Performance Organizations (PHPO).

Board Orientation is not a Determinant

Since board members and presidents encompass the authority of the institution, it is fitting that the study includes how the board and president demonstrate and encourage a culture of continuous quality improvement in their community college. In fact, all five participants governing boards prescribe to the Carver Policy Governance model. Policy governance defines and guides appropriate relationships between an organization's owners, its board of directors, and its chief executive. When participants were asked, "How does the board align short and long-

range organizational goals to AQIP and the commitment to CQI?" it was apparent from all five participants that their board members made a genuine commitment to align organizational goals to AQIP and CQI. By contrast, four participants shared similar experiences with board orientation, and one participant shared that the board should not be oriented or be involved with AQIP.

Four presidents had similar responses to this question, agreeing that an orientation to community college board affirms their commitment to CQI. Brent called upon her institution's accreditation liaison officer to provide important information about AQIP to keep her board informed of AQIP Action Project activities. Brent stated:

> One of those annual sessions is by our Vice President for Academic Services, and he's also our AQIP person, so the board has heard lots of information about AQIP, about quality initiatives, about action projects, about the systems portfolio. I think they are well versed in that.

Brent, whose Vice President for Academic Services serves as the institution's Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO), held workshops to orient the board. Easter, although serving a state Board of Regents and a local Board of Trustees, was confident that her locally elected board was well oriented to AQIP. Easter replied:

> Well, you know, we have two boards if you will. We have the Board of Regents that coordinates that, then we have a locally elected Board of Trustees. I mentioned this earlier that when we went to our AQIP training sessions, we took a board member with us.

Easter did not use her own internal Accreditation Liaison Officer of her college, she chose to have one of the local board of trustee members attend an AQIP Strategy Forums as a form of orientation. The AQIP Strategy Forum is a collaborative way to provide the training and resources within a hierarchical chain of command. Easter echoed the response of Brent by declaring:

So, the board has heard lots of information about AQIP, about quality principles, about action projects, about the systems portfolio."

Easter, whose board member attended the AQIP Strategy Forum, asserted, "When the board member came back, she then gave the report out to the rest of the board."

Two participants declared that their boards know very little about AQIP. When asked about AQIP Chavez responding saying, "I don't think the board knows as much as they should about AQIP." He went on to say:

> But in terms of our governing board and their role in AQIP, I'm not going to lie to you. I'm thinking that it's limited. If I went to our board members and said, "Please describe what AQIP does," I'm not sure I'd like the response. He went on to say, "I don't think they know, to tell you the truth—as much as they should.

Deere had this to offer in respect to her board. Her board had a fair amount of turnover, and she briefly summarized the point by saying:

> That in all fairness, the board members right now are a little more familiar with the strategic plan than they are with AQIP. The things that they have had touch with though is the strategic plan and some of the budget situation.

Deere indicated the institution has been straddled with a major budget crisis in the state, so much so, that the community college has been in reactionary mode because of the situation. Deere explained that some of their important initiatives in respects to AQIP simply kind of fall further down the list. The initiatives the board has been intimate with is the strategic plan and the budget decisions. Deere went on to state:

> But, I wouldn't say that the board necessarily right now is hugely up-to-date on AQIP. We've been in AQIP for long enough that we're kind of in the middle of one of our cycles, so they haven't had a lot of touch with that. I think this is the fairest way I can answer that.

Deere is a seasoned veteran of AQIP and HLC Peer Reviewer, who recognized that, despite the issues described previously, AQIP is what they have been doing for a long time, and it is been a very positive process for her community college. Coolidge, a HLC Peer

Reviewer and Baldrige Examiner, was exclusive in her response to board orientation to

AQIP by pronouncing:

> I don't, and here's why I'm saying that, and this is weird. My theory is strange, because they don't need to understand accreditation. Accreditation is compliance. They need to understand are we doing the right things we're supposed to do as an institution in higher education.

Coolidge explained that her board has adopted policy governance, and establishes the

overarching ends of the college, and that is what the board should be concerned about. She

further explained that her college reports progress to the board through 42 monitoring reports

throughout the year. She went on and stated, "They need to understand the results and the

output and be able to speak to it." Coolidge cited a benefit that she has observed:

> If you come and do a comprehensive quality review, you're going to ask them about student satisfaction, they're going to say, well, we used the CCSSE survey of student engagement and we look at the measure of satisfaction and dissatisfaction by if we're not meeting our target.

Despite all the motivations shared by four presidents to orient the community college

board of trustees to AQIP, Coolidge has been successful at pursuing and sustaining CQI

without her board being intimately involved in understanding AQIP. None of the other four

presidents shared the same philosophy or approach taken by Coolidge. Despite seeing the

value of both approaches, she endorsed her approach by declaring, "And trust me, my board

has no qualms offering up other opportunities for planned improvement, because they're

committed to continuous quality improvement."

In the past, the AQIP sponsored Strategy Forums required that institutions participating

have a board member in attendance; however, that is no longer a requirement. Still, the

Strategy Forum provides an excellent opportunity for community college board members to

get oriented to the AQIP pathway. Strategy Forums provide valuable cross-functional team

time to work to improve the culture and infrastructure and develop an Action Project

committed to continuous quality improvement away from the institution.

Coolidge's perspective was unlike any of the other four presidents. She suggested that

her board did not need to understand AQIP. Coolidge took the position that the board needs to

understand whether the college is doing the right things they are supposed to do as an

institution in higher education. For example, Coolidge stated:

> Trying to explain Criterion One, Helping Students Learn, doesn't have value to them. The board owner-representative authority is best employed by operating as an undivided unit, prescribing organizational ends, and clear recognition of the metrics that performance would be evaluated on.

Coolidge believes this is very rational. Once the strategic plan is built around the

Strategic Ends, they champion these Strategic Ends. The president should work with committee

groups and employees to write performance plans with their performance objectives built

around the work that is going on in the Strategic Plan. This is supported by Coolidge

announcement:

> They get 42 monitoring reports throughout the year. And every single one of those monitoring reports is a result that's shown in accreditation at some level or another. So, let's say for instance the Peer Reviewers on our campus are going to ask the board this question about, "Do you look at student retention, completion, and persistence?" Their answer is going to be yes. That's a yearly, annual monitoring report. Here's where we're at with persistence and completion; here's where we want to be.

All 42 monitoring reports, she explained, are linked to process and are reflected in the

results section of the Systems Portfolio they submit to the HLC and she explains, "that's where

their time and energy needs to be focused."

By comparison, Brent, Easter, Chavez, and Deere all believe it is important to engage

governing boards in some form of orientation to AQIP and CQI. By contrast, Coolidge was

adamant that orienting the board to AQIP and CQI is not necessarily a determinant of success

in the pursuit and sustainability of CQI.

Commitment to Principles of High Performance Organizations

      Research and experience indicate that common PHPO—Focus, Involvement, Leadership, Learning, People, Collaboration, Agility, Foresight, Information, and Integrity— permeate colleges and universities that have achieved a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement (Principles of High Performing Organizations, 2010). For this study, the presidents were asked, "What organizational structures do presidents believe are necessary to support a continuous quality improvement infrastructure?" Although none of the presidents specifically mentioned the PHPO by name in their responses, countless times when individual perspectives were shared, the participants characterized the individual PHPO. To understand how pervasive the PHPO are to CQI, Table 3 (below) illustrates which of the PHPO and associated words were most cited in the responses of the presidents. In this section, connections are made on how the presidents demonstrated the common PHPO in their approach to pursuing and sustaining CQI.

Table 3: *Frequency of Principles of High Performing Organizations (PHPO)*

PHPO	STUDY PARTICIPANTS					
	BRENT	CHAVEZ	COOLIDGE	DEERE	EASTER	TOTAL
Focus	1	1	4	1	7	14
Involvement	1	2	0	1	0	4
Leadership	9	2	13	8	6	38
Learning	7	4	7	8	5	31
People	26	32	72	29	17	176
Collaboration	1	0	1	0	1	2
Agility	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foresight	2	2	1	1	2	8
Information	12	3	64	15	3	97
Integrity	1	2	12	1	3	18
Total	56	46	174	58	42	

Easter was the exception: when she started employment at her college, it was not a member of AQIP. After a year and a half on the job and reaffirmation of accreditation under Easter's leadership, the institution joined AQIP. Easter acknowledged, that AQIP whose foundation is constructed from the criteria of Baldrige was the infrastructure she needed to expedite continuous quality improvement, demonstrating the use of the information and the College's agility to join AQIP right after reaffirmation of accreditation.

Chavez acknowledged that he was new to the Higher Learning Commission and AQIP and did not fully comprehend the expectations at the beginning. Quickly learning, he discovered that the cycle and expectations to continuous quality improvement was much different than what he had experienced in Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Chavez acknowledged his lack of comprehension:

> Well, I think first, I've never been in an AQIP school before. I was in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) area, so I did three SACS evaluations. I really had to learn the AQIP model. I mean, I've heard it, I've gone to conferences, I've heard of AQIP and some little things here and there, but didn't really grasp, I guess, the full impact of what AQIP is expected to do. The learning curve was steep for me. I had to really do a lot of reading and stuff into what AQIP expected.

Chavez stated, "He was fully committed to the AQIP pathway." Chavez went on to say:

> I think you've got to demonstrate—you've got to commit yourself to that. I think all your staff needs to be able to see that the president is a full part of this initiative. Some of the institutions I've visited, you can see that that's not happening, that the president is more of a standoffish, like, "Well, if you guys want to do AQIP, go ahead. It's all yours. Let me know how it comes out." I can't do it that way.

The following comment expresses Chavez's leadership perspective and expectations in sustaining CQI. Chavez is referring to published documentation of AQIP Action Projects and Systems Appraisals that demonstrates a considerable drop in performance by member community colleges throughout the second eight-year cycle:

AQIP institutions are initially successful during the inaugural cycle of AQIP. However, secondary data sources such as systems appraisal feedback reports, AQIP Action Project reviews and news articles suggest, institutions are challenged with maintaining internal advocates for AQIP and sustaining the momentum throughout the second eight years in the pathway.

Coolidge mentioned learning is a significant part of AQIP, learning organizations

and PHPO. She stated:

It's a lot easier just to keep doing what we've always done. Our last Systems Portfolio unfortunately did not demonstrate that we were an AQIP institution. We didn't have any results that we had submitted. We have like 18 months to learn all of this and so fortunately I could spend a lot of time with people at the institution, talking about AQIP, and what does AQIP mean. What does it mean by the results and processes? I had a lot of just meetings and conversations about, "Here is the process and how do we know it's effective?"

Coolidge continued to draw parallels to the PHPO learning and learning organizations by stating:

For me, I used to do a lot of CQI presentations and PowerPoints and AQIP presentations, so I had a lot of things already on hand that I had used with other institutions or consulting or planning. I, as the president, had to spend a lot of time pulling some results and saying, "See, here's what a result would look like and what process we might tie this to?" So, it was a lot of interactive workshops, and we did that quite a bit.

In considering the question, Deere was thinking about an external pressure that

called for leadership, focus, and agility. Deere, referencing the tough financial times in her

state and the current CQI initiatives, said that the primary focus is on the lack of financial

support from the state. Deere emphasizes:

I relate a lot of our problems right now are not with AQIP or not with the CQI process, but with flat out the fact that we haven't received our funding for fiscal year 2016, and 2017 doesn't look good, either. […] I think this is the fairest way I can answer that: since I've been in this position, we have almost had to be in such a reactionary mode because of the budget that some of the other initiatives simply kind of fall further down the list.

Deere further explains the need for her to provide encouraging feedback to have

employees who are fully invested in CQI principles and practices. Deere underscores:

The bottom line of the day is you have the work that you must get done and what we always try to avoid is making continuous quality improvement just one more thing that

we do on the list of things to do. It should be more about how you do things and how you do them in a continuous quality way. It's difficult sometimes to keep that message on the forefront of already tired people—that's my biggest challenge.

Deere is describing what happens when she is focusing on framing ongoing communication, discussion, and improvement to faculty and staff. CQI leaders often relying upon previous experiences demonstrating focused communication and foresight to changes may affect operations to stabilize issues within their academies. This assertion is supported by Deere's explains:

> Yeah, I'd say it's pretty ever-encompassing right now, because you really are trying to put a positive face forward and move the college forward with continuous quality improvement, with data-driven decisions, when the truth of the matter is you're not real sure if you're going to be able to make payroll by the end of the year.

Brent has learned that AQIP is about pursuing strategic quality initiatives but is also about modeling behaviors that lead to continuous improvement. The following comments by Brent support this sentiment:

> Accreditation needs to be more than just checking items off on a list and we have been explicit about talking both about the Aspen Award and the Baldrige Award as aspirations for the institution. You don't have us as an award winner yet, but I bet you will someday.

Brent wanted to be sure it was understood that she was working with her constituents to pursue a greater accomplishment of being recognized for quality by one of the national excellence in higher education award programs. Based on Brent's experience, she prescribes that AQIP is more than accreditation and demonstrates foresight, which is one of the PHPO.

A review of documents and speeches from Brent's institution indicates that a frustration with the lack of urgency and commitment by her faculty, staff, and administration to engage continuous quality improvement was the motivating factor to join AQIP. In addition, the Malcolm Baldrige criteria seem to have guided the

development of the infrastructure by which she used specifically to assess the College's

commitment to CQI:

> I began to become a little impatient because it seemed to me we were moving too slowly, and I made the decision probably a year and a half into our own work of continuous improvement to use AQIP as the means to help us build that foundation.

Brent continued by saying:

> We became aware of AQIP briefly and made the decision that we would prepare to enter AQIP, so, we organized four teams of individuals to focus on four key pillars that could drive our continuous improvement and we worked at the Baldrige criteria to help shape those pillars.

In the course of the interview, it became clear that the two PHPO, leadership and

learning, and the disciplines of learning organizations are embodied by Chavez. Leaders are the

advocates of learning centered environment, leaders are responsible for building organizations

where people are continually expanding their capabilities to shape their future; that is, leaders are

responsible for learning.

Coolidge's involvement level in AQIP and CQI is very hands-on. Among the

presidents, Coolidge's institution appeared to have the most robust and healthy CQI

systems and processes and learning organization environment. It was beneficial to receive

first-hand information from a leader who is familiar with the AQIP process, and its

employees demonstrate an enthusiastic commitment to disciplines of learning

organizations, PHPO, and personal learning as the path to continuous quality

improvement.

Deere identified financial challenges as an external factor that contributes to her

community college's ability to practice CQI in her response to being asked about her beliefs

regarding AQIP and CQI. Deere correlates the question with not having received funding from

the state, restructuring, and job changes. Despite the financial issue described by Deere, she has

not abandoned the PHPO. It appears that she engages PHPO focus and foresight are proactively used to collaborate with her constituents.

Community college presidents participating in the AQIP pathway are often asked to balance institutional priorities and rationally analyze the most efficient means by which goals can be achieved. By comparison, all five presidents commented that by default sometimes the emphasis falls on compliance, while critical, may detract from institutionally pursuing AQIP's PHPO and CQI initiatives. Additionally, all presidents had favorable comments about AQIP and agreed AQIP is about a commitment to common principles CQI, not compliance.

By contrast, Brent, Chavez, and Easter suggested that compliance is a must have, starting point, or baseline, and the pursuit of a culture of continuous quality improvement is the next step to becoming a great community college. By comparison, all five participants agreed that a commitment to continuous quality improvement encompasses meeting the increased internal and external compliance standards of accreditation and the use of continuous improvement principles (PHPO).

Employee Orientation to AQIP and CQI

Participants were asked to reflect on what implementation strategies and expectations were the most significant in preparing their constituents for CQI. When asked the question "What organizational structures do presidents believe are necessary to support a continuous quality improvement infrastructure?" all five participants believed the importance of providing professional development on AQIP and CQI.

Three presidents stated as their institutions embarked on the journey to implement the infrastructure of AQIP and CQI principles, people started using a different language. Again, although the PHPO was not specifically mentioned by name, four presidents stated their

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constituents have a consistent vocabulary associated with AQIP. Brent commented:

> When we started our quality journey under my leadership, there was not a free flow of information on the AQIP or CQI. We set out to develop a culture on campus that would foster organizational learning. There was not a level of comfort with the AQIP model.

When asked the follow up question, "How do you orient college employees to

AQIP and CQI?" three participants indicated that the main source for professional

development was internal and external experts in accreditation and CQI. Brent

responded:

> We have been explicit about talking both about the Aspen Award and the Baldrige Award. I do know that we brought in a colleague from another institution that was soundly grounded in AQIP, and she spoke to the faculty and staff.

Easter asserted:

> I think we used our AQIP team, because those were really peers of the faculty and staff. We used our AQIP teams to train their colleagues. We would always have conversations about, "Hey, continuous improvement is in our vision. We can't be premier if we don't continue to improve." It's consistency of message.

Chavez declared:

> What we're trying to do, is we've got to start work on our Systems Portfolio for Year 3. The Provost and I met and we're trying to choose a criterion chairperson that a good person that maybe did not have that responsibility the last time we did it. We're trying to share the wealth; I guess is the best way of saying that. What I want to do is bring people in those teams that will be ready to move into the chairperson's role the next time we do our final Systems Portfolio before the visit. So, it isn't the same people over and over and over to oversee these tough responsibilities.

Coolidge continued sharing this story of an aha moment regarding practicing CQI for one of her

employees. Coolidge shared:

> I was talking with our Developmental Ed director—and this is one that was probably a resister. I said, "How's our Developmental Ed program?" She goes, "We've got the best Developmental program in the state." I said, "Wow! How come?" She said, "Well, we've got tutors, and we've got this curriculum, and we've got these books that our students work in that we've had since 1974. We've got the learning commons and our students love our teachers and we have the most fabulous teachers!"

Coolidge offers a thoughtful commentary on how involvement in AQIP makes for a better working environment and gives faculty and staff a broader perspective on decisions. She explained it this way:

> So, you must frame your conversations around why, why now, and what happens if we don't, and then how does it impact you. When you have those conversations, then people can maybe say, "Well, I guess that does really impact me," or, "I thought it would impact me, but it doesn't." That really brings people on board for buy-in. That is another way to ingrain that improvement thinking in the culture. We changed our language, too. We're all about piloting, we're all about trying things, and the other part of our language we changed was we didn't use the words "mistake" or "failure."

Deere, similarly to Coolidge, took on the responsibility and role of orienting administration and staff to AQIP and CQI. Deere suggests:

> Under my leadership, we do have something in our new employee orientation that we didn't used to do years ago, but now we do. Any new employee that comes to the college goes through a significant day of orientation. Regardless of what the position is, whether they are a groundskeeper or whether they are an IT person—I don't think we do it for faculty—but every other area of the college, the person comes in and then they have that orientation which talks a lot about the initiatives of the college and how to effect change and how their job is broader than just what their job description states.

Again, this message of continuous quality improvement is always part of the conversation and is a huge part of the institution's vision. Brent was intentional in leveraging internal and external resources, by using the college's ALO and advocates of AQIP outside of the organization to train colleagues and provide important information about AQIP. One member of the training team is an HLC Peer Reviewer and these types of efforts and strategies are very common for leaders to adopt.

Easter had made it clear that she seeks out the people who best support her vision for the institution using in-house training and bringing in a colleague from another institution; she was comfortable with a person who has spent a great deal of time on continuous quality improvement. The in-house folks were two Peer Reviewers who really carried the torch and

were advocates for the quality process.

Chavez voiced concerns that the responsibility of developing the college's System Portfolio was in danger of being the responsibility of the same people who developed it the last time. Chavez and the provost strategized about how they can get untapped faculty and staff oriented and participating in the activities of the AQIP pathway. This comment also summarizes the concerns of faculty and staff within the institution may not have the in-depth knowledge to be active participates in AQIP and CQI efforts. The involvement of employees is one of the PHPO and a strategy for engaging others in the journey to create a culture of collaboration where teams are valued, and innovation and change are encouraged.

By contrast, Coolidge and Deere took on the personal responsibility and role of orienting their constituents. Coolidge emphasized a significant point that sometimes people just do not know. Coolidge continued stating:

> And I said, "Okay, how do you know you have a great program?" "Well, we have great tutors; we have students; we have the learning commons; and all of that." I asked six or seven times and she finally said, "I don't think I'm answering this correctly." [I replied]: "No, there's no wrong or right answer. You're saying all the right things about how much you think the program is beneficial. But do you realize the pass rate in our Developmental Ed classes is below 31%?" She looked at me, and she said, "Oh my gosh! You know, that's terrible. We've got to change that." And in that situation, she didn't know.

Coolidge highlighted with this story how important a culture shift in mindset when working within the infrastructure of AQIP. Community college employees must be oriented to the concept that AQIP and CQI offers a chance to self-assess, look forward, try new approaches without the fear of punitive reactions, and focus on stakeholder needs in a much more meaningful way.

Deere emphasized that AQIP requires college-wide participation and the potential is always there for many more people to be involved. Deere went on to say:

Oftentimes too, these are the people that when we put our AQIP committees together for AQIP projects; we pull people from all areas of the college with all levels of expertise to make sure that we're getting that broad buy-in.

It appears that faculty are not exposed to these same orientation activities as others. Therefore, there is the risk that if you ask a faculty member if they know how their work applied to AQIP, they probably would say, not really. An opportunity exists for the college to share the general perspectives based on their experiences and the extent to which AQIP and continuous quality improvement permeate throughout the college with newly hired faculty.

The appeal of AQIP to higher education presidents is continuous quality improvement, and those processes that require the involvement of administrators, faculty, and staff. A cultural revolution can occur and lead to a mutually supportive environment in which faculty and staff become more directly involved in shaping and monitoring the mission, purposes, and strategic directions of the institution. This could result in positive changes in morale and attitudes. All five presidents described in one way or another that AQIP activities at the college provides an opportunity for participation that could include a significant proportion of the college.

Effective Communication is Critical

The ability to clearly and effectively communicate as the president was critical in leading CQI efforts. When responding to the question, "Could you start by sharing highlights of the challenges you faced while pursuing organizational continuous quality improvement?" all five presidents stressed they must be highly effective collaborators and communicators. Brent commented on the importance of collaboration and consultation, but also the willingness to take some risks, and its importance. Brent emphasized:

> I think the description of a president that Lumina has crafted is quite aspirational and I try to keep that in mind as I move forward. That talks about the importance of collaboration and consultation, but also the willingness to take some risks, and I think that's just important. You want to blend challenge and support in the right quantity and that varies,

depending on the situation, depending on the division that you're working with, depending on the goals that you're trying to achieve. But I think that's just important.

Brent stated that the previous president had established what they called an "Involvement Task Force," and that was a group of folks brainstorming and collecting data on why employees quit being engaged in the college initiatives. Easter noted:

> Well, when the "Board" hired me, they were looking for someone who could come in and be a bit more nurturing, being a stronger collaborator, and a better two-way communicator. I think my inquisitive mind was useful, because I was a student of effective leadership and paid attention to the traits of ineffective leaders. I had some exceptional mentors, and not that I had 15, 20, or 25 of them, but I had at least three who helped shape my ability to lead.

Chavez thinks that compliance is interfering with his faculty and staff commitment to CQI according to this statement:

> I think that examples have got to be there, and the president has got to have some passion about AQIP. If I came in and just said, "Well, I don't want to do this either, guys. But you know, if we're don't do this, we're going to be put on probation." I mean, that is just a morale killer, so I think you've got to have some proactive leadership in terms of saying, "Hey, this is good for the institution."

Coolidge went on to discuss the role of the president:

> I couldn't just delegate this out. There are certain things that leaders must get that ball rolling, get it in place, because for a lot of people, it's foreign. I'm a coach and a teacher at heart. I want to coach; I want to mentor; I want to teach—you get that. Luckily for me, I'm a high-energy person and I just kept pounding away at this, and that's a bad phrase, but we just—I never let it fall off the radar.

Deere shared:

> I think that my strongest ability would be my ability to communicate effectively so that people are aware of why we're doing things, how we're doing things, and what happens if we don't do things. So, I would say that leadership training has been very helpful and listening to the people in all positions at the college and being a good, strong listener helps. I would say the ability to change and ability to adapt to be a good listener.

Communication is particularly important as a leadership trait and one shared by all five participants that could influence the climate of community colleges to help ensure

successful implementation of CQI strategy. Brent thinks quality communication is a

priority for the institution and explains why:

> We're still working on internal communication, and I think our challenge now is not so much transparency as is overload of information, so we've got to figure out ways to make it more effective for people. It's not that it's not there, but quite frankly, it's from the firehose sometimes.

Brent is referring to initiating discussion and suggests that constant communication is

apparent within the college for continuous quality improvement to permeate throughout.

Similarly, Easter's board of governors gave her clear direction to improve how the

president engages with constituents particularly how and what information is

communicated and the direction of communications. Easter's board of governors

determined that communication was perhaps the most important element of being a

successful leader of the institution and driving force behind CQI.

Chavez's response could indicate a lack of trust between faculty and staff towards

administration, a climate of fear by faculty and staff who believe they are being evaluated

based on the performance of their academic or service units. The role of administration in

CQI has a strong connection with climate and culture. Chavez believes leaders should

embrace the pursuit of CQI with open arms and a positive attitude. He did not want faculty

and staff to have a negative energy by experiencing AQIP as compliance and reporting.

Chavez encourages his constituents to consider the experience as real and necessary

positive change. He continued and stated, "We do it for improving the quality of the

College, anything we do for quality that's good for our students, and it's good for us."

Chavez accentuates sharing this type of message with all constituents. Chavez was

concerned his faculty and staff viewed AQIP as compliance reporting.

Coolidge shared that the role of administration in the roll out of CQI is very important

in how it influences the organization. Coolidge described how it is important for leaders to communicate, understand their organization's culture, and determine how it is affecting strategy implementation and ultimately performance. Also, she emphasized that, if leaders are not familiar with the climate of their institution, trying to lead CQI is going to be a challenge, compared to trying to lead CQI with a critical mass on board. By contrast, Deere also acknowledged communication is important, but highlighted being a good listener is a specific quality that helped her efforts to lead CQI.

Sustaining CQI Efforts

Sustaining Continuous Quality Improvement

The AQIP pathway is intended to create opportunities for presidents to lead their perspective institutions in CQI efforts. This level of involvement is endorsed heavily by advocates of CQI. When asked, "What strategies do you deploy in setting clear expectations for becoming a high performing institution and attaining a culture of continuous quality improvement?" all five presidents indicated sustaining a culture of continuous improvement starts with the leader developing a strategy that involves integrating CQI into existing college structures.

Two participants Brent and Easter believed their college planning system were best suited to facilitate CQI. Brent thinks that linking strategic planning to CQI is a good strategy. Brent stated:

> You must have a strategic plan, and I call it "Vision 2020," so that's what ours is called. You pretty much can't miss that. What we've done that really has helped is I think we've added some of those AQIP initiatives right into our strategic plan. I give credit to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. We have Vision 2020, and all the governance groups related to various measurable objectives in the strategic planning document.

Easter went on to say:

> Performance goals were generated through AQIP, the state board of regent's performance
> agreement, and institutional strategic planning process were all integrated. The college
> would monitor, how the plans were progressing, what the outcomes were, whether the
> units and divisions were achieving that and then if not, what the institution could do to
> help them achieve the outcome.

Brent's focus is on the strategic plan which has short- and long-term goals that relate directly to

AQIP action projects. It is a model used by many AQIP institutions.

> Another perspective on the leader developing a strategy comes from Easter who suggests:
>
> We just kept working to build to critical mass and eventually we got to the point where
> every division within the college— across academics, across student services, across
> administration— and every department in every division was required to develop a unit
> performance management plan. We formed an integrated planning and resource
> allocation team that was charged with helping the units and the divisions develop and
> monitor the plan and then providing that global oversight.

Deere highlighted the strategy of using the president's council for setting expectations and

accountability of CQI. Deere stated:

> We had to begin to look at the data, and if we didn't think that that was as good as we
> wanted it to be, then we had to look at our process. I would say that one of the strategies
> that I have would be to communicate that expectation in the president's cabinet (PC). In
> all my direct reports, which essentially would be all the vp-level or the director-level of
> people for all the branches of the college have an expectation that when they are making
> their decisions, they do it in a data-driven, student-centered way.

> By comparison, all five presidents cited collaboration and involvement as strategies in

infusing CQI throughout the college. All five participants alluded to collaboration and

involvement as strategies influencing CQI. Brent's emphasis of linking the pursuit of CQI to the

strategic plan works very well to move towards measuring work, improving work, and changing

work.

> In contrast, Easter had concerns the college had too many initiatives and sought an

integrated approach with AQIP projects and college-wide goals. Chavez described a strategy to

encourage involvement and collaboration—two PHPO—through the college committee structure. Chavez established several standing committees which require each be led by a faculty and staff co-chair and directly link to CQI initiatives. Coolidge's approach was informed by a model of CQI called Collect, Examine, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (CEDIE). Coolidge stated:

> Let's develop our plan of action, let's implement, but then let's evaluate if that plan of action was effective. So, developing that planning model as an institution and having it trademarked kind of became a point of pride for people. People would say, "Hey, I have a good idea," and you'd hear other people say, "Well, go Collect, Examine, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (CEDIE) that," or, "CEDIE it."

CQI is a key priority for Coolidge, and the visible real commitment and support of CQI is demonstrated by leading the effort to develop CEDIE. The CEDIE model, like PDCA, facilitates continuous improvement that is inclusive of capturing and recording evidence of those efforts.

Deere discussed data-driven decision making and student-centered approach as strategy deployed in setting clear expectations of sustaining CQI. She believes the institutional strategy that vice presidents and directors must demonstrate this behavior to move the rest of the institution forward with CQI.

For a CQI culture to be sustained, it requires a leadership system that supports a quality culture consistently modeling those values and behaviors that communicate to all constituents a clear and compelling vision of the future. The approach taken by four of the presidents was an integration of CQI principles and practices into the strategy infrastructure. By contrast, one president developed a CQI model that aligned with the strategy infrastructure. In analyzing the importance of strategy, there was confirmation and general agreement to formulate a clear, long-term strategy for CQI and integrate it into the key strategies, policies, and objectives for the organization.

Leadership Turnover Impacts CQI Sustainability

Several barriers to sustaining CQI were identified. However, when presidents were asked the question, "What impact does leadership turnover have on pursuing and sustaining (a culture of) continuous quality improvement?" There was a great deal of consistency and distinction in the responses to the question: two participants noted that they had one person at the executive level leave and replaced by another person; however, three of the participants suggested that leadership turnover impacted the college's ability to pursue and sustain CQI. Three presidents, however, highlighted the need to understand and effectively navigate the previous administration's resistors to refocus the college's CQI efforts. In general, the presidents describe stability of leadership and senior leadership turnover as factors that impact a community college's ability to sustaining CQI. Brent suggested that the impact of turnover and change in leadership was minimal with her direct reports; however, there was a lack of transparency in the way information was communicated. Brent stated:

> I have in some respects made some major changes and in other respects, not so much. The essential leadership team, what has been called "Strategic Council" here, is relatively intact. We have had one person at the executive level leave and replaced by another person.

Easter stated:

> To the best of my recollection, I don't recall people leaving the institution because we were focused on continuous improvement and we were focused on working at it and making changes based on what the data was telling us.

Easter was primarily referring to direct reports when discussing the very low employee turnover. Easter notes that her direct reports choose to remain at the college rather than work somewhere else. Her comments suggest that her leadership team, all but one person, were grateful to be in an emerging environment of CQI in which their voices were heard, and an environment in which when it was warranted that they could or should be part of the decision-making process.

At the beginning of their tenures as president, Chavez, Deere, and Coolidge all

experienced conflict within the organization that was residual from the previous administration

over the best way to move forward with the AQIP process

Chavez stated:

> Right before I got here, they had a very awkward situation. The provost at that time got into—I guess the nicest way to say it is that—he and the president got into a major confrontation and the provost left. But what was bad was that the campus was split; the faculty and the staff, half of them were in the past president's camp, half of them were in the Provost's camp, and they wouldn't hardly even talk to each other.

> Chavez inherited an uncomfortable situation when he became president. There were

accreditation concerns raised by the HLC at the time he entered the college. The campus was

divided on an issue that occurred between the previous president and current provost and

communication was not effective, and there was a lack of transparency in the way information

was communicated. The folks in the provost's camp were refusing to participate in AQIP and

CQI initiatives, which presented a challenge for Chavez. Chavez stated:

> To be honest, I have intentionally been aware of what was going on with AQIP.… It's accreditation. It needs to be done, but that doesn't mean they have to like it. It does mean that they must be involved just as they were when we wrote the first Systems Portfolio.

Chavez's mindset was that the work of AQIP needed to be done, but everyone throughout the

college must participate. He remarked, "Some employees just haven't been paying attention to it;

for others it was 'tell me what I need to do for AQIP; let's keep our accreditation and get on with

things.'"

Deere stated:

> That had an impact, especially when you've got a board of trustees that is also changing. Yeah, we've essentially had five presidents in the last five years. Since I've been in this position, we have almost had to be in such a reactionary mode because of the budget that some of the other initiatives simply kind of fall further down the list.

Deere continued to say:

> Then you've got all your VPs and some of the deans that are getting juggled around as
> well; so yes, we've have had a lot of transition. In my sense, my first year as president
> was relatively easy before the budget crisis came, because people were simply happy that
> they recognized the face of the person in the president's office. You know, that kind of
> added some calmness to their day, because we really were up in the air for a while. But
> then on top of that, then what happened is that calmness went away rapidly because of
> the budget crisis.

Coolidge stated:

> Two of my leaders stated it was a lot easier just to keep doing what we have always done.
> So that took energy, and they both said, "I'm too old to learn all this stuff." They
> anticipated that they did not have that type of energy left in them. I told them, "I support
> you and your decision," and they retired.

To complicate things even more, as Coolidge acknowledged:

> Now I will say that there is a current vice president who doesn't buy into this, and
> unfortunately, it's on the academic side. It has an impact, and I'm not going to disagree.
> It has impacted the ability as an institution to stay focused.

Coolidge continued to say:

> Here's how I might tie this back, and it baffles me. I think that's an anomaly because like
> I said, I have included everyone. Now I'll tell you what: my life would've been so much
> easier if the five VPs who reported to me were systems thinkers and knew how to use
> data and thought like me when I got here. It would've been so much easier. But I'm glad
> it wasn't because what I've learned from this is you just can't rely on your top leadership.
> There is turnover; we have a huge gap, and I don't think I'd do anything different.

Coolidge suggests:

> I think it did impact some of our momentum I will say, having the leadership change to
> some degree. Those that were kind of getting on board with it and saw the results, they've
> got a new leader, and they weren't sure if their new VP was going to be on board, and
> then they had to spend time kind of getting him up to speed. So, it kind of did change the
> momentum a little bit.

> The PHPO (2010) states, "Leaders have a responsibility to make sure that everyone

understands and values the institution's mission, goals, and directions—and uses this

understanding to inform individual work goals and decision-making strategies" (p. 1). Chavez

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reinforces this common principle when he suggests, "When I came here, a lot of what I had to do is really build that teamwork back together in terms of, you know, I don't want sides; there can't be sides here."

Deere, similarly to Chavez, thinks that turnover at both the board of governor's and executive leadership levels had an influence on the college's ability to sustain a culture of CQI. Deere thinks that it does matter significantly what happens within the administration, particularly with the president. She thinks this attrition suggests a systemic problem that leadership must address to rectify concerns. Internally CQI is not a focal point when budget challenges exist. In addition, her comments support the perception that the consistent presidential changes and budget woes have caused competing priorities and the inability to sustain CQI initiatives.

Brent does not believe employee turnover, at that time, impacted the college's ability to sustain a culture continuous quality improvement. This comment also echoes another of her observations. Coolidge's tenure as president did not begin with a divisive culture or a tremendous amount of turnover at the president level but, rather, with a situation where two long-time senior administrators did not see themselves as part of this new regime. The problem Coolidge encountered when replacing those two leadership positions, because of their decision, was that the people coming in didn't have that skillset that she needed to facilitate strategic planning and CQI. She had people reporting to the two new senior administrators who had more experience about CQI efforts.

Coolidge is concerned that this vice president is not as knowledgeable and effective as needed, and that the vice president is not going to be able to make systems-thinking decisions. She mentioned repeatedly in the interview that she includes everybody and has given everyone the opportunity to come on board and learn about CQI. She believes the old model was to rely on

the top leadership to guide and lead CQI. She has seen firsthand that doesn't always happen. Coolidge views CQI as a bottom up not a top down effort. Coolidge is describing the effects of senior leadership turnover in the College, and the lack of CQI knowledge and experience can have on CQI momentum.

By comparison, the AQIP process requires institutions to operate more like businesses by taking a systems approach to problem solving and encouraging a data-based decision-making process. Because of this philosophy, AQIP institutions may have adopted or created organizational structures, affiliations or practices that more readily support their transition into a culture of continuous improvement. Wheatley (1999) found that turnover of leadership can result in a lack of support for, and problems with, continuing improvement efforts. In addition, senior leadership turnover (Roberts, 1996), organizational inertia, and resistance to change (Koch, 2003) were also cited as implementation barriers.

Resistances to Change and CQI

Research demonstrates community colleges leadership and boards have moved to AQIP and its underpinnings of CQI based on evidence of dysfunctional systems and processes impacting student and stakeholder needs, inefficiencies in employee production, and lack of overall institutional performance. When asked the question "How did you respond to the resistance and negative propaganda from your institution's constituency groups or individual influencers?" all five participants indicated that there was a lack of trust between faculty and staff towards administration, and some faculty and staff believed they would be punitively evaluated as the college adopted the AQIP framework and principles of CQI. Two presidents mentioned that they expected the move to AQIP would influence the culture of the college; however, they stated possibly in a negative way from the beginning.

Brent emphasized new thinking and actions are needed to lead continuous quality

improvement efforts. For example, Chavez responded that I show support by "not

undermining" efforts when the old guard of the institution push back on activities or efforts of

CQI. Chavez leadership is exemplified through the following statement:

> It was not like I sent my subordinates out there on their own. If I really needed somebody to play the bad guy, I came in and did some of that. So, I think if there had not been the support of the board and there had not been more importantly that another senior administrator coming in behind and saying you guys really must do this it would not have, not all of it would have gotten done.

Brent went on to state:

> Now we're needing to do some reorganization, not in ways that will be that threatening to the current leadership team, but it'll be threatening because it will require a different skillset in some cases than what they're used to having.

When asked if there were any specific strategies that she used to respond to that mentality,

she responded, "Well, frankly, we used HLC as leverage." She continued:

> They (the resistors) should be part of our continuous improvement team, so they could then work with their colleagues to get them on board. You know the old rule about you will hardly if ever get 100% of people on board with an initiative. Again, that's not to say there weren't detractors—trust me, there were. But there was enough trust that we could go that direction with the critical mass.

Brent stated:

> I tried for the first year to see if we could somehow get to a meeting of the minds— common ground— and we got to the point where there was going to be a diversion, by her choice or my choice. […] So I was pleased that she was able to retire, I think that was a smooth transition as we could have hoped for and I think basically there was a feeling of relief among others that that had been addressed.

Brent summed up the situation by stating:

> The institution for several years operated in an autocratic style. The decision-making pattern is we encounter a problem, we do our best to solve it kind of, and then if we can get a solution or it looks like a bigger issue, we bring it to the president, the president involves anybody else who might need to be involved, and then the president decides.

Easter stated:

> In the beginning, it was a little painful for some, and I would say, frankly, we met the
> most resistance among faculty members, especially long-time faculty members. You
> know the old rule about you will hardly if ever get 100% of people on board with an
> initiative. […] We got to the point where we chose not to invest time and energy in that
> small group of naysayers. I'm currently in the middle of that strategy right now, and if I
> can get some other counterparts in the organization not to respond to those flare-ups by
> those 10 or 15 within the organization, I think we can make some progress.

Chavez stated:

> When I was coming into the presidency, internal issues made for an uncomfortable
> situation —because the campus was so split and divided on that issue that occurred
> between the past president and the provost. The faculty and staff, half of them were in the
> past president's camp, half of them were in the provost's camp, and they wouldn't hardly
> even talk to each other. When I came here, a lot of what I had to do is really build that
> teamwork back together in terms of that.

Coolidge stated:

> There are two types of individuals in most institutions. Those who really don't want to
> change just because they're comfortable in their job, or it's their baby, or they created it,
> or it's sacred to them. Then most of the people who might appear resistant to change, it's
> because they don't know how to change, what the change will look like, and how the
> change is going to directly impact them. […] They're about the institution, they're
> friends; they're critical. Let's use them to help us stay in balance.

Deere echoed the sentiments of Easter asserting:

> Yeah, and we have had some resistance. But to be honest with you, I think that a lot of
> that has gone away, and I'll tell you why. I think that because our institution continues to
> do things in a better way, that people that don't like change have seen positive changes
> based on the continuous quality improvement, so then they don't battle it as much as
> what they might have in the beginning.

Deere stated:

> External influences such as financial stress can challenge an institutions ability to pursue
> or sustain continuous quality improvement efforts.

Deere also spoke to resistance, when she pronounced:

> Yeah, and we have had some resistance. But to be honest with you, I think that a lot of
> that has gone away, and I'll tell you why. I think that because our institution continues to
> do things in a better way, that people that don't like change have seen positive changes

based on the continuous quality improvement, so then they don't battle it as much as what they might have in the beginning.

Deere's interview could be characterized by the following comment:

What we always try to avoid is making continuous quality improvement just one more thing that we do on the list of things to do. It must be more about how you do things and how you do them in a continuous quality way. It's difficult sometimes to keep that message on the forefront of already tired people—that's my biggest challenge.

The Impact on Institutional Culture

The impact on culture is addressed indirectly throughout this chapter. Tatro (2007) challenges those who believe that leaders are unable to influence the culture of an organization. Tatro's (2007), as cited by Riccardi (2009), led him to believe that 'Leaders create culture' and clearly demonstrated how one leader was able to change the culture and implement a successful CQI program" (p. 138).

Of course, the support of the president is crucial beyond providing general encouragement and verbal support within the institution. On the other hand, sometimes executive support is evident, but not as active as might be ideal. It was very clear, that all the presidents were very confident that some faculty and staff would support them in any way necessary. Further, all knew that there would be some who would support their change management efforts even without knowing the details of a plan. Presidents Brent and Coolidge shared similar thoughts about people in their institutions not knowing how to be an active, engaged employee to change. Both clearly understood that change takes time; nevertheless, these two community college presidents were willing to help people along into retirement to set the agenda that CQI was a priority and non-negotiable. Brent also believes that there is a need to value employees.

Easter encountered what she proclaimed as, "the mentality from some that we are

already a great institution." The faculty members acknowledged that they were already good and questioned why they needed new ways of doing things. She also stated, "It was a little painful for some, and I would say frankly, we met the most resistance among faculty members, especially long-time faculty members."

All five presidents noted that resistance as an obstacle in terms of their ability to pursue continuous quality improvement. All presidents stated that faculty were the main resisters to pursuing CQI. Resistance from faculty stemmed from a range of perceived perceptions, but often participants believed a lack of respect and appreciation for CQI was at the heart of the matter. The data indicate that presidents encountered even stronger barriers in integrating self-assessment mechanisms, and shifting institutional culture and infrastructure, especially in academic areas, to inform continuous quality improvement. A quote from Coolidge sums up the totality of what all five participants shared about resistance. Her faculty and staff leaders stated, "It's a lot easier just to keep doing what we've always done." Coolidge continued to say, "I cannot operate in an environment where I am constantly putting out fires or fighting off alligators, as we might say here in the south."

President Brent offered views of positive and negative aspects of faculty needing to know more about the CQI process to be effective. After asking a series of questions as part of the learning process to identify the faculty leader's frustration she noted, "An hour and a half later, some faculty members said, 'We give up. We can't do it.'" Brent replied, "If you can't do it after living and breathing this work for years, how do you think the students feel?"

On the positive side, Brent replied, "I've worked a lot with faculty members. I had some tools available that made it easier for me, and I've been blessed to have people who are talented and willing to contribute, so we haven't had a lot of resistance and negative

propaganda." Coolidge had a similar situation involving two leadership team members who she requested facilitate efforts to engage faculty and staff in CQI. The response was, "that takes energy" and both said, "I'm too old to learn all this stuff; I don't have the energy; I support you." And they both retired. Coolidge suggested that part of the job of a leader is to get conflict out into the open and use it as a source of creativity. Other presidents shared quotes from the constituents including "AQIP is just the flavor of the month"; "leaders are reluctant to share power"; "leaders are in denial in acknowledging their problems", and "we are not willing to change."

One of Brent's top administrators was an influential naysayer. Brent reported that faculty and staff were uncertain in terms of people not knowing how to be actively engaged in CQI. In addition, she was seeking balance between being overly prescriptive or too vague in supporting her subordinates understanding of CQI principles and practices. She reinforced this notion when she proclaimed, "Now we're into needing to do some reorganization, not in ways that will be that threatening to the current leadership team, but it'll be threatening because it will require a different skillset in some cases than what they're used to having."

However, it is important to note here that all AQIP institutions are required to attend a Strategy Forum that provides opportunity to improve culture and infrastructure where resistance and challenges with implementation of CQI can be sustained. The implementation of new systems and process or altering of current ones can sometimes create barriers and challenges with pursuing CQI.

A review of some of the institution's accreditation documents and newspaper articles clearly identified behavior that Brent noted when he emphasized the importance of more leaders getting involved with CQI because, if it is important to them, it would be important to

their faculty and staff. More importantly, it could lead to less resistance by faculty and staff. Brent proclaimed, "The thing that we're working on right now is building strength in our executive team across divisions and departments, and I think that's what's going to make a difference for really working a plan." The shift in resistance supports the literature of Senge (1991), who summarized the role of the top leadership is often building a shared vision, empowering people and inspiring commitment and enabling good decisions to be made through designing organizational learning processes.

As Easter admitted she sought out some of the people who were the least supportive of CQI and looked to convert them into advocates. This was particularly risky move as some of those people had never worked in higher education before and had to learn the meaning of quality in community colleges. Nevertheless, they understand the concept of aspiring to be a quality institution. The efforts by Easter appear to be supported by the literature of the PHPO, particularly the principle of Involvement.

The PHPO (2017) states, "A culture of involvement requires ongoing development of people's skills in making fact-based decisions, working with diverse groups, resolving conflicts, and using quality-based tools to build consensus." Easter was realistic in that she expressed willingness to resolve conflict and build consensus but, was not willing to compromise progress. Easter demonstrates that leadership and collaboration, two PHPO, are about being an influencer, changing people's behavior, and learning. However, leadership efforts in CQI are also about understanding that resistance and challenges will occur, and you can lead through involvement but not everyone will follow, and that is acceptable.

Chavez responded that his institution did not have a cohesive campus culture when he arrived. The institution was preparing to write its Systems Portfolio, and he did not want this

divide nor for his college to dwell on the past. He wanted the institution to focus on the future. Despite the resistance, a key factor impacting the presidents' ability to pursue CQI, is the degree of control and involvement constituents have in implementing those changes. Thus, it is critically important that administration involve both faculty and staff (particularly frontline staff) in designing and implementing initiatives such as AQIP Action Projects. Faculty and staff should have a degree of ownership of Action Projects, as well as the implications of other CQI efforts.

Coolidge characterized people who are resistant to change like this, "You know, when I called those individuals who crossed their arms and said, 'I'm not going to get on board with this,' they are critical friends." Coolidge views these "critical friends" as individuals who help the institution stay balanced with critical criticism. Coolidge is pleased that faculty and staff support CQI efforts but emphasized the importance the inclusion of employees like "critical friends" at all levels of the college who could enhance a more positive attitude and culture towards CQI.

Deere noted that persistent reductions in state funding may hurt or help sustain the institution's efforts to improve effectiveness and efficiency. State funding led Deere to engage in a comprehensive off-cycle program review initiative informed by high impact data analytics. Deere summarized this point by saying, "as an AQIP institution, continuous improvement never stops." This president demonstrated a personal commitment to the CQI, and principles of high performance organizations by avoiding self-promotion, by considering financial and human resources, and ensuring continued and consistent communication while attempting to secure a stable future for her community college. Deere described a situation where a current budget crisis in her state has not allowed for a stable workforce. She stated,

"Even though we have had some people who have retired, we just haven't had the money to fill positions."

People are critics of the pursuit and sustainability of a CQI culture. According to the PHPO (2010), "Respect for people and the willingness to invest in them leads the quality-driven institution to prize and support the systematic development of its individual faculty, staff, and administrators" (p. 2). The following statement represent the challenges with resistance to CQI faced by each president. All five agreed that they experienced most of their resistance from faculty; however, resistance was inclusive of all constituency groups of the college. Like the other presidents, Easter and Deere advised resistance from faculty was not always the case, both remarked that it took more than three years and a consistent focus on professional development and setting expectations of CQI before folks were comfortable enough to go out and identify "what can I do" to improve this or that in the college.

Chapter Summary

In summary, all the presidents expressed similar frustrations with challenges and resistance to sustaining CQI. Whether right or wrong, it is the reality of the community college characteristics, climate, and culture. The questions above resulted in rich qualitative data regarding internal and external forces that drive presidents' motivation for and ability to fulfill their responsibilities to foster a culture of CQI. Spanbauer (1995) stated, "Top-level buy-in and support are essential to show everyone on the campus and in the community that the administration supports the quality improvement initiative" (p. 524).

It is important to recognize that the organizational culture of an institution and the leadership style(s) of key individuals are important aspects that should be considered when pursuing continuous quality improvement.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

This research examined the individual experiences of community college presidents that may have contributed to pursuing and sustaining culture of CQI in the AQIP pathway. This chapter discusses implications from the results and suggests recommendations for future research, as well as proven principles and behaviors of community college presidents that could contribute to improving the effectiveness of pursuing and sustaining CQI in the AQIP pathway. The discussion and recommendations for future research will derive from the six research questions that guided the foundation of this study.

Questions one through three focused on the beliefs of community college presidents regarding AQIP and CQI, whereas questions four through six addressed how presidents go about sustaining a culture of CQI. The AQIP Pathway differs from the other accreditation pathways in that it is predicated on principles of continuous quality improvement, and its various processes and requirements are designed to assist institutions in achieving quality improvement.

The AQIP pathway is intended to create opportunities for presidents to lead their respective institutions in CQI efforts; however, there is a lack of documented evidence to support that institutions who have presidents fully engaged in leading the program are more effective in the AQIP pathway than those who do not.

Discussion of the Research Questions

The six research questions that guided this study:

1. What are the beliefs held by the president regarding the Academic Quality Improvement Program?

2. What are the beliefs of the president regarding the continuous quality improvement?

3. What organizational infrastructures do presidents believe are necessary to support continuous quality improvement?

4. How do presidents define/measure a culture of continuous quality improvement? What policies and procedures do presidents believe are necessary to sustain a culture of continuous quality improvement?

5. How has the governing board been oriented to the Academic Quality Improvement Program and demonstrate support for sustaining a continuous quality improvement culture?

6. What impact does leadership turnover have on sustaining (a culture of) continuous quality improvement?

Question 1: What are the beliefs about AQIP?

The findings suggest that beliefs held by all five participants was that their internal constituents' motivation to fulfill the requirements of AQIP was driven by compliance. Some presidents explained that AQIP, to their faculty and staff, appeared to be additional work that is driven by compliance. Previous research by McDonough (2012) suggested that the HLC Open Pathway for continued accreditation separates the accreditation process into two components: (1) the Assurance Process and (2) the Improvement Process. This separation was largely a response to criticisms that regional accreditation is not rigorous or transparent to external stakeholders.

Sylvia Manning, the former president of the HLC stated, the new Pathway model's most distinguishing variation would be clearly separate "compliance" from "improvement" (Lederman, 2009). The compliance piece for AQIP would come from more frequent reviews of institutions' portfolios of data and materials while at the same time allowing institutions greater

flexibility in selecting which institutional projects they would like to focus on for the improvement part of the accreditation process and review (Lederman, 2009).

The study findings suggest that presidents of AQIP did not observe an overall separation of compliance and improvement. All the presidents believe that CQI cannot be viewed as a separate standalone procedure; in fact, AQIP is a culmination of procedures including Strategy Forums, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Appraisals, Federal Compliance Review, and Comprehensive Quality Review Visit, all evidence of CQI practices. Collectively, all five suggested that there is a diplomacy needed when presidents are setting expectations of ensuring compliance requirements as opposed to pursuing CQI through AQIP. Ideally, compliance requirements are fulfilled if their college is pursuing CQI through the various components of AQIP. All of the presidents interviewed for this study believed that in a high-performance AQIP community college, the underpinning is CQI, and compliance is incorporated into the everyday work of the institution.

The 10 common principles that AQIP aspires for itself and its participating institutions are appropriately called the Principles of High Performance Organizations (PHPO). This study had the aim of exploring whether the characteristics of the PHPO are present in all presidents' efforts in participating in AQIP and sustaining CQI. These principles help to corroborate that presidents pursuing a culture of CQI are demonstrating the qualities necessary to be successful. In the interviews, each of the presidents referred to these principles, in many instances not directly, using the specific PHPO term, but indirectly while sharing their individual experiences.

Question 2: What are the beliefs held by presidents regarding the CQI?

One of the most relevant benefits of AQIP is that it underscores CQI. One of the principal findings of this study was that most of the participants had implemented some form of

CQI, and that all the community colleges were still using CQI even though the initial enthusiasm has dwindled. Within the literature review three CQI methods were described: Total Quality Management (TQM), Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA), and Baldrige Performance Excellence Program (BPEP). Several participants reported integrating CQI into the strategic planning process, PDCA model, Achieving the Dream (ATD), and state level performance agreements to set expectations of the importance of CQI.

These practices contradict earlier literature that suggests that CQI is an accreditation "flavor of the month" and that higher education institutions have moved on from this approach of quality management. According to Birnbaum (2000), CQI has the features of an organizational fad where early implementation fades away after a few years. In this study, two presidents who can serve as HLC Peer Reviewers acknowledged that after the first 8-year cycle of AQIP, institutions appear to lose their momentum and evidence of CQI is less profound.

Presidents at high performing community colleges espouse a culture and infrastructure of analyzing their systems and processes in an effort to improve overall performance. For community colleges to improve performance systematic evaluations of operational units and academic, CQI programs need to exist. Some presidents indicated that while AQIP had a positive impact on their approach to accreditation, CQI changed the way the institution thinks about their work, does their work, makes decisions, and investigates the root cause of problems with institutional operations and programs. These findings are broadly in line with those of many researchers, including Brua-Behrens (2003), Thalner (2005), Tranby (2012), and Frickx (2015).

One of the themes to emerge from this analysis and consistent across the presidents' experiences and the findings was the prevalence of a climate of resistance from administrators, faculty, and staff. These, too, are broadly in line with those of researchers including Thalner

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(2005), Riccardi (2009), and Tranby (2012). Implementing continuous quality improvement practices is focused on systems, processes, performance results, and how an institution systematically strives to enhance both its processes and results. In many environments, these practices excite behaviors from internal constituents including resistance to change, fear of punitive reaction for inadequate performance, and lack of consensus among the senior leadership.

While the study's presidents did experience early adopters and advocates for change and CQI, as previous research has revealed, cultural resistance to CQI is a norm in higher education. The findings revealed that, at the administrative level, resistance was often due to new presidential leadership and fears of not having the abilities to meet new expectations. At the faculty and staff level, resistance emerged mainly because people did not know how to change, feared change, had misconceptions of what "quality" implies, and were not familiar with the common Principles of High Performance Organizations.

It would be reasonable to say that, in the pursuit of sustainability of CQI in community colleges, while colleges exhibit similar strategies in operationalizing quality principles, at the same time, they exhibit many differences in their approaches in addressing cultural resistance. For all AQIP community college presidents, it is imperative that they leverage the AQIP Strategy Forum. By working with a cross-functional team from their community college, they can identify strategies to implement quality principles and simultaneously identify approaches to build a culture and infrastructure of quality.

Question 3: What organizational infrastructures are necessary to support CQI?

The findings suggest that a real passion for and commitment to CQI from the president is a strong motivational factor to build an organizational culture and infrastructure. The presidents'

transparent support of the process is the key component in pursuing and sustaining a culture of continuous quality improvement in AQIP. The literature overwhelmingly states that CQI processes emphasize the importance of unwavering leadership. The president sets the attitude for the community college and without this commitment, any continuous quality improvement program is compromised from the beginning. As Malm (2008) concluded in his study evaluating six community college presidents' views on leadership, organizational pressures, and change processes, the president's recognized leadership is the central theme to CQI processes.

Similarly, this research found that the study participants identified their leadership to be essential to the success of CQI. Four out of the five indicated it was instrumental in having the BOG commitment as well. The four presidents emphasized the support of the BOG was critical when approving resources, championing unpopular change, and holding people accountable. By contrast, one participant, Coolidge, believed the BOG adopted policy governance. The BOG involvement was, for her institution, at the outcomes level. Therefore, she believed the 42 monitoring reports that shared results and outcomes of accreditation, operations, and continuous quality improvement efforts had value to them.

While other characteristics were discussed and deemed to be important variables to CQI, all the presidents agreed their leadership and labeling themselves as the champion of CQI was most credible within the institution. Furthermore, the presidents showed a clear preference for their institutions to be engaged in or in the process of pursuing a quality award through their state, Baldrige, CQIN, or the Aspen Institute. This reflection is important because it demonstrates a strong commitment by the presidents to quality initiatives outside the AQIP process.

Another theme to emerge from this analysis was the importance of organizational learning regarding the principles of CQI. Senge (1990) identified five disciplines considered critical to the development of a learning organization: building shared vision, team learning, personal mastery, mental models, and systems thinking. The AQIP pathway has principles that resemble Senge's five disciplines of learning organizations that look for institutions to provide evidence of internal constituents having awareness beyond their individual job functional area, use of problem solving, and use of reflection to review action outcomes.

There are certain steps that leaders must take to the process moving and to get it in place, because for a lot of people, the process and the approach are unfamiliar. This research was intended to also explore Senge's disciplines of organizational learning as well as the application of PHPO. For many institutions, CQI is something new. An extensive review of the literature, including work by Freed and Klugman (1996), found the more an organization is committed to learning, the more committed it is to continuous quality improvement. Study participant Coolidge, for example, led her institution by developing a continuous improvement model and educated faculty, staff, and administrators throughout the institution. It was so successful it permeated into the student body where it was used to make improvements to student-led processes.

Question 4: How do presidents define/measure a culture of CQI?

Data are very important component of the AQIP pathway as well as with other HLC pathways and regional accreditation models. Data collection and measurement are part of each of the six AQIP categories and include collecting, analyzing, reporting, and disseminating data for improvement. Frequently, appraisals of AQIP Systems Portfolios identify concerns to be addressed in the areas of the use of data to inform decision making. The most common statement

presidents express is that "We use data to make decisions, and we use data to inform improvement." However, when CQI advocates are asked about the measures they used collect and analyze regularly, their use of data was less pervasive than expected. In this study, presidents Coolidge and Easter were the only respondents who identified specific measures linked to CQI. Easter explained that the college has 23 total key performance indicators tracking CQI efforts, and Coolidge shared that her college has 42 indicators linked to CQI. Unfortunately, this lack of ongoing CQI measures is a common theme for many AQIP community colleges.

These findings, however, are also consistent with previous research by Thalner (2005), Tatro (2007), and Riccardi (2009) highlighting CQI approaches with quality indicators that encourage data informed decision-making. Moreover, these finding are consistent with published System Appraisers of AQIP community colleges that have suggested institutions are not providing adequate evidence for Category 7, Measuring Effectiveness.

Community college leaders interested in demonstrating a culture of CQI existing at their institutions must collect data to provide evidence that the college has a systems approach to collecting and using data, a self-assessment of the systems for collecting and using data for effective decision-making, and an awareness of how data are used to identify opportunities for continuing quality improvement.

Question 5: How do presidents orient the governing board to AQIP and CQI?

Most of the presidents believed that it was very important to orient their governing board to AQIP and CQI. This was a practice they felt worked well at their community colleges. The literature describes many reasons why higher education institutions are embracing continuous quality improvement and several mention accountabilities to governing boards as a driver due to funding challenges, community pressure, and stagnate performance. These findings are

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consistent with previous research conducted on CQI activities initiated by governing boards and external constituents (Lewis & Smith, 1994; Spanbauer, 1996; Carey, 1998; Benson, 2000).

This research question had the aim of exploring how the governing boards were oriented at the participants' community colleges. It is important to note that all the community colleges in the study prescribe to Carver Policy Governance Model (CPGM). The CPGM model enables the board to focus on the larger issues, to delegate with clarity, to control management's job without meddling, to rigorously evaluate the accomplishment of the organization—truly to lead its organization. Although the presidents may have recommended or provided access to orientation of AQIP and CQI nonetheless, that does not necessarily mean that boards made themselves available to be educated. The findings suggest that governance model, particularly Carver's policy governance model, is not a determinant for a president to sustain a culture of CQI through AQIP.

Unfortunately, the nature of the study data does not allow this analysis to address the effect of orienting, or not orienting, the governing board is an effective best practice. To some extent, this null finding is at odds with other authors who describe continuous quality improvement activities initiated by governing boards or other community college constituents requiring improvement in performance (Lewis & Smith, 1994; Spanbauer, 1996; Carey, 1998).

Question 6: Impact of administrative turnover on sustaining CQI

The study findings suggest that leadership turnover is an influencing factor of the inability to sustain a culture of CQI. Based on the literature, leadership from the institution's president is a determining factor in success of CQI. Likewise, other key leadership positions are needed to champion and advocate for the change, organizational learning, and the work that lies ahead. Wheatley (1999) found that turnover of leadership can result in a lack of support for, and

challenges with, continuous quality improvement efforts. During the infancy stages of CQI implementation, the process can create an environment that appears top-down, implies administrative secrecy, portrays role ambiguity, and generates organizational tension.

At the beginning of participant Chavez's tenure as president, there was great concern with the divisive of the college climate that existed after the departure of the former president and chief academic officer. Presidents Brent and Coolidge encountered situations at the beginning of their careers that involved asking a high-level administrator to get on board or voluntarily retire. Consistent with the research (Neefe, 2001; Thalner, 2005; Tranby, 2012, Frickx, 2015) and the PHPO, leadership is a shared principle associated with any community college that has achieved a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement.

The challenge facing community colleges when experiencing administrative turnover is sustaining energy for CQI. The literature revealed that any community college CQI program will encounter challenging obstacles when community colleges experience administrative turnover. The most important aspect of any CQI program is support from the entire administrative leadership who all must keep that message on the forefront and articulate an unwavering support.

Conclusions

In the year 2000, the Higher Learning Commission launched the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) an alternative accreditation model that specifically infused continuous quality improvement into the process to maintain regional accreditation. Many community college presidents viewed AQIP, designed from the blueprint of Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, as an innovative project encompassing CQI that led to documenting evidence of meeting the HLC criteria of accreditation. After seventeen years of AQIP, the program bares little documented evidence that presidents of community colleges that

pursue AQIP has successfully sustained a culture of CQI within their institutions. However, the participants in this study were applying the majority of the PHPOs and the theoretical framework and characteristics of learning organizations. Information indicates that the practices of these community college leaders in this study to design systems that allow faculty, staff, and administrators to learn successful practices from each other reflect principles of learning organizations. In addition, effective leadership, team building, and management skills are emphasized in these community colleges.

The institutions that were the furthest along in CQI had developed infrastructures that were committed to learning about quality improvement, developing strategic plans that are outcomes driven, providing professional development for individuals within the institution, clearly communicating the vision, collecting and analyzing data to inform decisions, improving communication, emphasizing teamwork and collaboration, cultivating a quality culture, and financially supporting continuous quality improvement efforts even through budget challenges.

Regardless of where the institutions are on their continuous quality improvement journey, faculty, staff, and administrators recognized a commitment to improving the community college, that continuous quality improvement is a continuous process, and that they are members of a learning organization.

The purpose of this study was to uncover the interpretations of community college presidents regarding past, current, and future perspectives of sustaining CQI and organizational learning in the AQIP Pathway of accreditation. The researcher's beliefs prior to the study was that presidents of AQIP community colleges were not fully committed to the responsibility, principles, and accountability of leading CQI. There is very little empirical evidence, however, that higher education institutions, particularly community colleges, are adequately sustaining

CQI in the AQIP pathway. The solution may be that presidents of AQIP community colleges need to take on the role, responsibility, and accountability for leading the CQI efforts and organizational learning of their institutions if they expect success and perpetuity.

Although the AQIP pathway is intended to create opportunities and have identified Principles of High Performance Organizations (PHPO) to assist presidents in leading their respective institutions in CQI efforts, there is a lack of documented evidence to support that institutions who have presidents fully engaged in leading the program are more effective in the AQIP pathway than those who do not. There are statements dispersed throughout the six research question responses that could indicate that these AQIP institutions are demonstrating principles of Senge's five disciplines that are instrumental in developing a level of maturity as learning organizations.

On the face of it, this would suggest that PHPO and organizational learning may be important factors in achieving a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement. In addition, adopting an infrastructure that aligns CQI to a model such as PDCA, Achieving the Dream (ATD), or state-level performance agreements to set expectations and to guide the institutions CQI program is also important.

While some community colleges have been successful without adopting these practices, some have not sustained a culture of CQI because they lack the commitment of the president to lead the program. This is an area of this study that may be most helpful to presidents of community colleges. Even though this study was limited to AQIP community colleges, the findings, conclusions, and implications could impact the pursuit and sustainability of CQI in colleges and universities through the country. The study appears to support the argument for a

change in the delegation of the leadership of the AQIP pathway being left to other administrative leaders in the community college by the president.

In addition, the absence of a continuous improvement framework like PDCA creates an environment that may lead to a lack of understanding and contribute to division between faculty, staff, and administration. The opposition and lack of understanding by faculty and staff may produce a tension that may contribute to dysfunction within the institution. A model such as Senge's Five Disciplines or Deming's PDCA cycle centralizes efforts by structuring its processes around repeating cycles of learning and improvement.

While the number of community colleges participating in the AQIP pathway has actually decreased over the past few years, the implications of CQI on those who have continued their membership is thought-provoking. Unfortunately, the nature of these data does not allow the study to determine whether these institutions fare any better than those included in this study in sustaining CQI.

Still, there is a considerable amount improvement to be made by community colleges in demonstrating the common PHPOs that permeate institutions that have achieved a systematic approach to continuous quality improvement. Each of the PHPOs incorporates all stakeholders of an institution and represents the essential mission of quality driven management and improvement through accreditation. These qualities underlie the Academic Quality Improvement Program's categories, components, processes, and activities. This lack of emphasis on the PHPOs may lead to a deficiency of understanding by faculty and staff regarding their participation and expectations within CQI.

Future Research

This research is a contribution to those presidents in the higher education community. Leadership qualities uncovered through this study exposed successful practices for presidents in implementing and sustaining a CQI program at AQIP institutions. New presidents to AQIP institutions have an opportunity to adopt strategies revealed from these seasoned presidents which could increase their effectiveness and success in cultivating a culture of CQI.

If this study were to be replicated, these would be the suggested recommendations. First, additional studies should involve more participants. This study's results would have been more beneficial and informative if based on the experiences of additional AQIP presidents. Second, interviews with additional presidents could also potentially validate the findings across the varied landscape of community colleges. Third, the research could be replicated to include community colleges outside the AQIP pathway and outside the regional accrediting body of the HLC.

In addition, to validate these conclusions and evaluate the importance of leadership within learning organizations that pursue the CQI principles, research should be conducted examining the specific ways that a leader influences the CQI process. The literature and findings of this study consistently discuss the importance of the president leading the CQI program and promoting organizational learning. A CQI program that lacks commitment of the president and organizational learning is likely destined for failure or at the very least, will experience much more resistance during implementation and lack sustainability. Success of the program and processes depends on the commitment of the president. Further research, then, should include interviews with Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs) and senior administrators leading CQI efforts to introduce their perspectives to this study. Interviews with ALOs and senior administrators could identify the PHPOs and behaviors contributed by a cross-section of leaders.

Related to a broader examination of the experiences of ALOs, another avenue for further study would be collecting experiences of other senior leaders who have been delegated the responsibility, accountability, and authority to lead CQI efforts by the president. In many institutions, a wide range of senior leaders, outside of the administrative team, have been delegated the responsibility, accountability, and authority to lead CQI efforts for the college. The descriptions of experiences and past and current, as well as perspectives of ongoing efforts to sustain CQI from these individuals could add additional rich data.

For future action or policy, additional research could explore whether AQIP that lost its effectiveness as an accreditation pathway. This impression could be based on its overrepresentation and association with institutions that are not high-performing organizations. While the literature provided well-documented evidence of CQI practices, the identification of key performance indicators was not as well documented.

Furthermore, a study could be conducted to determine if identified problems are within the AQIP pathway model itself or if they represent a resistance to organizational learning by community college presidents, administrators, faculty, and staff. Finally, a study could explore the cultural challenges new employees—who are highly motivated, come with different experiences, a set of strong beliefs in CQI and organizational learning, and innovative ideas — face when brought into an institution to lead AQIP efforts. This researcher's experiences in leading accreditation efforts through the AQIP pathway, CQI program, and organizational learning suggest that they may be a rich source of information and could significantly impact future accreditation activities and processes.

Personal Reflections

It is the hope of the researcher that this study will inform and improve the beliefs, practices, strategies, and outcomes of presidents of AQIP community colleges. Also, the researcher hopes that this study will provide illumination to the HLC for some potential improvement opportunities for the AQIP pathway. This study's findings, however, because they focus on the AQIP pathway, while relevant, may not be entirely generalizable and useful to other accreditation approaches. By investigating various behaviors of leadership, this study revealed potential best practices when working towards sustaining a culture of CQI and organizational learning. The examination exposed positive characteristics that presidents can rely on to further build a critical mass of constituents to effectively implement the principles of high performing organizations.

As an HLC Peer Reviewer, who has been immersed in the AQIP pathway over the last ten years of my career, this researcher believes that AQIP remains a viable accreditation option for those institutions that were early adopters and new institutions who embrace what it means to be AQIP. AQIP emphasizes changing the system and organizational learning. To be effective, the president must be committed to this movement because ALOs alone cannot implement the changes and learning needed in community colleges. If a total day-to-day commitment did not exist by the president in these efforts, it may be inadvisable to pursue AQIP.

Chapter Summary

For community colleges that participate in the AQIP pathway, the general belief that continuous quality improvement is not something that starts and stops, but something that requires an organizational commitment to an ongoing process of organizational learning, self-assessment, change, and progress. Fundamental change towards a CQI culture is risky and difficult. The Principles of High Performance Organizations and the five interacting principles

that constitute a learning organization could serve as performance indicators and a system of measurement that focuses on the overall institution and the role of the president in the principles of leadership. The AQIP and CQI approaches operate symmetrically; thus, community colleges should orient all employees to CQI as the way business is conducted on a day-to-day basis.

Accepting new paradigms is difficult when the suggested change is radically different from the status quo. But through promoting, and implementing, and using continuous quality improvement in all aspects of systems, processes, and activities the institution can realize improvements in service to students and stakeholders, improve processes that help employees do their jobs better, maintain accreditation, and improve institutional outcomes. Continuous quality improvement always results in change, but change does not always result in improvement. It is this researcher's belief that, as community colleges develop increased expertise in the use of quality tools and implement changes pursuant to the outcomes, they will see a cultural shift that executes standards for institutional performance.

This study puts into context how five presidents behaved in definable ways that sent clear signals to their institutional members about the role of leadership in their college's efforts to practice continuous quality improvement successfully, and how the lack of leadership commitment also could impact an AQIP institution's ability to sustain a culture of CQI. Moreover, the multitude of literature suggests that the leadership of the president is most instrumental in successfully achieving a systematic approach to CQI. This researcher's perception of all interview participants was that their leadership was instrumental in the implementation of AQIP and CQI programs at their colleges and that their leadership is vital to the AQIP program.

The implementation of CQI principles and processes requires presidents to identify purposeful goals, plan activities, implement planning, assess results of implementation with measurable outcomes, and incorporate and integrate indicated modifications where appropriate throughout the institution. The similarities between the literature and the results of this study indicates an institution thrives when its president actively creates, leads, and supports a CQI-driven culture, modeling values and behavior. In addition, turnover at the president and administrative levels can also significantly impact the organization's ability to sustain CQI efforts. Leadership must ensure that the institution's systems and processes align with its mission and vision, making certain that the necessary resources are allocated and used in support of the overall mission and vision. The optimal goal for presidents is to integrate a model of CQI into the way the college does business each and every day.

AQIP is seventeen years old. This means the pathway should have evolved from the six charter institutions in 2000 to a respectable number of high performing organizations, certainly more than the approximately 150 participating in the program today. The inaugural six colleges should have produced evidence of the importance and effectiveness of the program. It is possible that, over the years, institutions began to feel the pressure to continuously improve at all costs or face that perception that the institution may not be worthy of being in AQIP.

The goal of AQIP was to increase quality within the context of reaffirmation of accreditation. After all these years, the CHEA, legislators, other regional accreditors, and higher education institutions are wondering if AQIP is the pathway that leads to demonstrated quality improvement, or if it has failed to be the pathway it was intended to be.

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APPENDIX A: STUDY MATERIALS

Text of Email to Solicit Participants

Dear President and/or CEO,

Hello, my name is Bruce Moses and I am a doctoral candidate at Ferris State University in the Community College Leadership program. With the help of my chair, Dr. Kristin Stehouwer, who is an adjunct professor in the program, I am conducting dissertation research into higher education institutions that are members of the Higher Learning Commission and participate in the Academic Quality Improvement Program. Creating and sustaining a culture of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is a key component of the Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) Pathway for Accreditation. The primary population of my research are CEO/Presidents who are or have pursued the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) Pathway of accreditation.

I am requesting your participation by allowing me to interview you to analyze your role as CEO in sustaining a culture of quality and excellence at Northwood University. If you agree to participate, I will contact you to participate in a 45 to 60-minute interview by telephone or video conference. With your permission, I will record the interview. During the interview, I will ask you open-ended questions to capture the behaviors, principles, and tools that led to the successful creation and sustainment of a quality culture at Northwood University. In addition, gain further insight into the challenges, opportunities, and threats to that culture now and into the future.

Aggregated data will be reported from the interviews. Participants names will not appear in my report. Participants will be identified by institutional title only. I will write about groups of people, not about one person. I do not anticipate any risks to participants. There will be no benefits for people participating in this research. Through this study, I hope to learn more about the CEO's role, behaviors, principles, and tools used to create and sustain a culture of CQI. and what are the gaps that separate high performing organizations from those who struggle to maintain a culture of excellence. I will have an opportunity to cultivate relationships with a diverse group of higher education leaders with incredibly important contributions to organizational excellence. These individuals have the responsibility for assuring that their institution is performing at a level that satisfies multiple constituents as well as helping the institution advance its mission.

I hope that you will agree to participate in this Dissertation research study.

Respectfully,

Bruce Moses

Chief Executive Officer Interview Questions

Analyze the higher education institution CEO's role, behaviors, principles, and tools.

1. What changes did you initiate to the infrastructure of the institution to ensure the consistent application of quality principles?
2. How did you differentiate between compliance and improvement to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement that was not built on external pressure such as your regional accrediting body?
3. How did you respond to resistance and negative propaganda from your institutions constituent groups or individual influencers?
4. What was your role in helping the institution win the quality award? What strategies do you deploy in setting clear expectations for becoming a high performing institution and attaining a culture of continuous quality improvement?
5. Does the institution employees continue to embrace the behaviors, principles, and tools that help to create a culture of continuous quality improvement?
6. How do you orient your board members to the AQIP Pathway of Accreditation?
7. How does the board align short and long-range organizational goals to AQIP and the commitment to CQI?

Identifying and developing credentials, skills, characteristics, traits, and qualities needed by key leaders.

1. What key credentials, skills, characteristics, and qualities are needed to be a successful leader of a high performing institution?
2. What experiences in your career contributed the most in supporting your ability to lead your institution to this award?
3. What professional development or training would you suggest a higher education leader interested in pursuing a culture of continuous quality improvement explore?
4. How are you currently balancing the demands of the CEO role and outside interests and activities?

Gain further insight into the challenges, opportunities, and threats to institutions that are challenged with sustaining a culture continuous quality improvement.

1. Could you start by sharing highlights of the challenges you faced while pursuing organizational continuous quality improvement?
2. Did the College have turnover or disturbances in key leadership roles prior to or after pursuing this effort? If so, did it impact the ability of the institution to stay focused on CQI?
3. How did you train and develop faculty, staff, and administrators to contribute fully and effectively to CQI?
4. What key performance indicators do you collect and analyze regularly to measure organizational continuous quality improvement?
5. What are the immediate threats to your institution sustaining CQI? How do address these threats and build on the current culture of CQI?

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research
Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, 220 Ferris Drive, PHR 308 · Big Rapids, MI 49307

Date: February 11, 2016

To: Dr. Kristin Stehouwer, Dr. Sandy Balkema, Mr. Bruce Moses
From: Dr. Gregory Wellman, IRB Chair
Re: IRB Application #160102 *(Sustaining a Culture of Continuous Improvement through The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP))*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "Sustaining a Culture of Continuous Improvement through The Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)" (#160102) and determined that it meets Federal Regulations *Expedited-category 2F/2G.* This approval has an expiration of one year from the date of this letter. As such, you may collect data according to the procedures outlined in your application until February 11, 2017. Should additional time be needed to conduct your approved study, a request for extension must be submitted to the IRB a month prior to its expiration.

Your protocol has been assigned project number (#160102), which you should refer to in future correspondence involving this same research procedure. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

Understand that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and participant rights with assurance of participant understanding, followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document and investigators maintain consent records for a minimum of three years.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual reviews during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,

Ferris State University Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs