A Phenomenological Study of the Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning Experiences of Senior Leaders Retired from the California Community College System

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of Drexel University by Jennifer L. L. Coleman in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education June 2013
Abstract

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Jennifer L. L. Coleman, Ed.D.
Drexel University, June 2013
Chairperson: W. Ed Bureau

California Community Colleges (CCC) are facing an ongoing wave of baby boomer retirements that started many years ago and hasn’t yet crested. With their retirements comes the potential to lose the “deep smarts” these leaders bring to their organizations, gained through decades of experience. Through the lens of changing workforce demographics, and a dedication to succession planning and knowledge management and transfer, institutions can work to capture some of this organizational history and information before it is lost forever.

This qualitative study looks at the first step in this equation - the lived experiences of a select group of individuals as they retired from senior leadership roles within the CCC system. The phenomenological approach allowed for patterns to emerge regarding the knowledge transfer experiences of these leaders both before and after announcing their retirements. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven individuals, and upon review of the raw transcription data through the coding process described by Saldaña as “pragmatic eclecticism,” three major themes emerged.

Each theme encompasses succession planning through knowledge management and transfer within the CCC setting, broken out as follows: 1) Succession Planning as a Process, 2) The Context of Succession Planning, and 3) The Means of Succession Planning. Results flowing from the themes include 1) California Community Colleges
need to increase their knowledge of succession planning to move beyond talk to action, 2) Personal career development and retirement journeys have the potential to affect organizational succession planning, 3) Institutional culture, personnel, and politics tend to impact succession planning efforts, and 4) Knowledge transfer is likely to be informal and individually, not organizationally, driven.

Recommendations are made for action on the part of both CCCs as a system of unique institutions, and individuals who may seek leadership positions within that system. Recommendations for future research relate to the expansion of the study population and exploration of the CCCs’ current practices as they relate to succession planning and knowledge management and transfer, including establishment of best practices within the system. Methods chosen for implementation should meet the needs and expectations of the retirees, their peers, and their successors.
This EdD Dissertation Committee from The School of Education at Drexel University certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

A Phenomenological Study of the Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning Experiences of Senior Leaders Retired from the California Community College System

Jennifer Lynn Coleman, Ed.D.

Committee:

W. Edward Bureau, Ph.D.

Holly Carpenter, Ph.D.

Joseph R. Radding, Ed.D.

June 19, 2013
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the many generations represented in my family. Thank you for your love, support, and understanding in all I have set out to achieve. I love you all and I am truly blessed.
Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the participants in this research study. I appreciate the time each of you took from your retirement to reflect back on the journeys that made your careers unique. I have witnessed the passion that exists in just a handful of retirees, and believe that if that passion and experience can be harnessed, exponential improvements could be made to higher education for the benefit of future generations.

I also want to acknowledge my personal contacts who helped to identify potential participants for this study. Without you, I would still be looking for people to interview, and not preparing to graduate.

Dr. Radding and Dr. Carpenter: Thank you for taking the time to serve on my dissertation committee and for your feedback and support. Dr. Radding, I am a better practitioner of APA style because of your high standards, and while irritated initially, I now appreciate the skills I developed through 815. En dash, anyone?

To my supervising professor, Dr. B: Thank you for your guidance and encouragement for the duration of my EdD studies. Cohort 3 has been fortunate to hear “it depends” while receiving direction on how to proceed based on our own mental models. A colleague spoke of how personal the doctoral journey is, and I am much more aware of my own leadership strengths and weaknesses as I remember the iceberg or the U, participate in the dance, or observe from the balcony. My vocabulary has expanded based on reflection and personal development, and for that I thank you and the other faculty, namely Drs. Geller, Combs, and Falletta.

Special thanks go out to my fifth grade teacher, Mr. Hudson, for teaching me how to write a research-based essay. And also to my sixth and seventh grades English teacher,
Mr. Gilmore, for giving me a love of sentence diagramming (and all of the grammar rules that go along with it) that stays with me to this day. Without this base of writing knowledge and practice, the dissertation process would have been much more difficult.

Annie: I would not have made it to or through this program without you pushing me the whole way. It was your phone call that made me finish and submit my application, and it was our decades old sibling rivalry that drove me to do my best and stay on task, even when I didn’t want to stay up and finish those dreaded discussion board posts. I didn’t do it to show you up, even though you think that’s why. I love you little sister, and I thank you for driving me to be the best. OK, maybe that sibling rivalry won’t go away now that we are done...

To my four grandparents: I consider myself to be the luckiest girl in the world to have had the unequivocal love and support of all of you for my entire life. Not many have memories of zucchini bread and Stewart surprises straight from the oven, just picked raspberries with cream for breakfast, a garden planted with store bought strawberries, a perfectionist streak, and a Masonic heritage all rolled into a warm grandma afghan that will cure any illness - even H1N1.

Mom and Dad: Thank you for developing the lifelong learner in me from before I can remember. Even today, I look forward to reading the random titles on your bookshelves and marveling at how you have accomplished all that you have starting out as young as you did. Thank you for having such high expectations and for not making college an “if” but a “where.”

Kevin: There is so much to say beyond the space that I have here. You are everything I could hope for in a supportive husband, and I love you. Thank you for all
that you have done to allow me to “go back to school” - I can’t promise the house will be cleaner, but I won’t be sitting at the computer for as long as I have been the last three years, and my homework will finally be done.

Gunnar: Thank you for letting me do my homework while you played with your trains and watched your episodes. I hope I have provided an example of what being a student and lifelong learner looks like, and if your desire to do your own work at the computer is any indication, you will be quite the student! “Mommy, I’m busy - I’m doing my homework.” Do I love you this much? This much? This much? I love you to infinity and beyond, and to the moon and back.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Introduction to The Problem

California Community Colleges, as a subset of the larger workforce, are facing unprecedented turnover as aging staff retire from the system in record numbers. The wave of individuals retiring from senior administrative positions in California Community Colleges (CCCs) may be heading toward its crest. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, between 2006 and 2016 more than 84% of community college presidents planned to retire (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Retirements at the top often lead to a domino effect, with each of the next lower levels of administration experiencing vacancies due to promotion (Wallin, 2006).

At the same time, California Community Colleges are facing budget challenges that have not been seen since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 (Ehn, 2004). Budget cuts are leading to the elimination of administrative positions of all levels including sustaining vacancies that may occur due to retirements or resignations (Baron & Fensterwald, 2011; Thor, 2012). The economic environment has impacted not only organizations, but individuals as well, who are delaying retirement in the face of reduced pensions and retirement accounts (Quinn, 2010). With fewer options for promotion and on-the-job training and development, today’s workers may be unable to gain critical knowledge and experience needed to successfully fill senior level positions in the future.

Opportunities for sharing organizational and individual knowledge do exist, though on a limited scale. In 1988 the Association of California Community College Administrators (ACCCA) created a mentoring program for the development of senior level administrators (Valeau & Boggs, 2004). And in 2006 the California Community
College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) implemented a strategic plan objective that each community college in the state create a leadership development program addressing succession planning in their college district (California Community College Chancellor’s Office, 2006-2007).

Unfortunately, while leadership development and succession planning programs have been implemented and encouraged through strategic planning within the California Community College system, a fall 2011 data set from the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) shows most district’s senior administrators’ average age over 50, and one district’s senior administrators’ average age over 62 (California Community College Chancellor’s Office, 2011b). With this data taken into consideration, time is of the essence to fully adopt the recommended knowledge transfer and succession planning strategies. Organizations and individuals that take a proactive approach may give future leaders an edge as they face these coming challenges (Aiman-Smith, Bergey, Cantwell & Doran, 2006).

Statement of the Problem to Be Researched

As changing workforce demographics lead to significant numbers of potential retirees, California Community Colleges need to consider the value of succession planning and knowledge transfer strategies in stemming the loss of knowledge that has the potential to put the organizations and their individual employees at a disadvantage in the future.

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the knowledge transfer experiences of a group of individuals, as they transitioned into retirement from
California Community College senior leadership roles. It is important to understand these experiences, because as the baby boomers, the largest population of today’s workforce, retire, much of their experience and knowledge, an organization’s “deep smarts” could be lost (Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). This loss of institutional history could place the CCCs and their future leaders in the critical position of trying to make up for decades worth of lost knowledge, which, once gone, is nearly impossible to fully recover (Calo, 2008).

Community Colleges educate approximately 10% of all college students, and California’s Community College system, with 112 individual institutions, is the largest in the country. With a combined annual budget of over $6 billion, and an economic impact ranging in the hundreds of billions of dollars, CCCs play a vital part in the economy of both the state and the country (California Community College Chancellor’s Office, 2011a). There are extremely high expectations that go along with this task, and those in leadership roles within this economic engine have a critical part in making sure the individual colleges meet those expectations (Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, 2012). It is vitally important to the continued success of the California Community College system that its future leaders have the ability to maintain or surpass the quality of education that currently exists (de la Teja, Dalpes, Swett, & Shenk, 2011). Continuity of leadership through succession planning and knowledge transfer is one way to ease the burden for the colleges.

Those to benefit from this study include both individuals and organizations. For individuals with community college leadership roles as part of their professional goals, increased knowledge and strategically designed development programs could mean promotional opportunities and future job success. Current community college leaders
looking to fill vacant administrative positions would also benefit through access to
decades’ worth of organizational knowledge and history. College governing boards of
trustees would be able to plan for future vacancies in high-level administrative positions,
knowing there is sufficient depth in the talent pool due to targeted practice. Human
resources professionals may see improved recruitment and retention rates through
implementation of proven succession planning methods. In addition, staff development
 coordinators would be able to offer innovative programs for future retirees and other
leaders currently on staff.

**Research Questions**

What were the experiences of individuals from the California Community College
system, as they transitioned from senior leadership roles into retirement?

What were the retirees’ experiences with knowledge transfer and succession
planning “before” formally announcing their retirement?

What were the retirees’ experiences with knowledge transfer and succession
planning “after” formally announcing their retirement?

**The Conceptual Framework**

**Researcher Stances and Experiential Base**

As a researcher, my philosophical stance is ontological. I acknowledge multiple
perspectives that are part of any interaction between two or more people in any given
situation, and I believe each individual processes and defines their own view and
description of reality (Creswell, 2006). Each person’s worldview and mental models are a
function of the totality of their experiences (Senge, Smith, Kurschwitz, Laur, & Schley,
2008). Therefore, with the unique perspective of every individual, each worldview is
different. My own worldview is centered on pragmatism, as I seek problem-centered, practice-oriented solutions. This pragmatic framework also ties into a methodological approach to research, with my own preferences for order creating a basis for structure and logic.

Based on my experience, I believe future community college leaders are at an immense disadvantage in these uncertain times due to a lack of training and guidance. As a member of Generation X and a former member of the management team of one of the 112 community colleges in the state, I have witnessed a lack of opportunity for knowledge transfer and leadership development within this structure. I sought out mentors and ways to develop skills on my own but was met with a lack of interest as well as a lack of readily available information and opportunity. Understanding the knowledge transfer methods that exist and ultimately comparing them with best practices may provide a framework for others to avoid frustration similar to what I experienced.

This issue is important to me, because I was the youngest member of a community college management team, made up of individuals from the President down to classified supervisors. As a continuing education program manager, I was one of only four (of ~50) managers who were not part of the baby boomer cohort. In my conversations with fellow managers, many of them expressed their plans to retire in three to five years – a moving target that existed over a period of eight years. With the budget cuts that resulted in my layoff, only two non-boomer managers remained.

From a strategic planning approach (my undergraduate major), I believe this will lead to a crisis of leadership within the organization that will take time to overcome. I also believe that with proactive planning and development the effects of this issue may be
alleviated and the organization as a whole could benefit. It is my hope to prove through future research that there is an actionable method to utilize for this process.

I believe California Community Colleges are unprepared for the wave of baby boomer retirements that has started and will continue for the next two decades (Friedel, 2010). I believe that, in some cases, younger leaders have been sidelined due to perceived threats to authority/status of current leaders (Klein, 2009). Still others have fallen victim to the “last in/first out” layoff strategy during budget cuts (Calo, 2008). I believe that there is an actionable solution involving succession planning and knowledge management practices that could assist community colleges in addressing the coming “potential crisis” (Keim & Murray, 2008).

I value long term planning and a guiding vision. I value flow of leadership from one leader to the next, and the encouragement and development of individuals who may fill leadership roles. I value lifelong learning and its impact on personal development.

**Conceptual Framework**

Framing this study in the context of the larger body of research around knowledge management and transfer, succession planning, and workforce demographics is important in establishing and maintaining the criticality of this topic to the future of community colleges in California. The need for quick and focused action is addressed by Riggs (2009) and serves as the basis for further research on the need to implement knowledge management and transfer strategies, and ultimately, change, at the individual community college level.

Current and future workplace and workforce demographic trends have been reviewed as they relate to the aging of the working population, the impact of multiple
generations in the workplace, and various issues around retirement (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Quinn, 2010). As changes to funding for entitlement programs including Social Security and education emerge (Myers, 2008/2009), the face of the average worker will change (Quinn, 2010; Longman, 2010; McManus, Anderberg & Lazarus, 2007). The impact of economic changes on the older worker may include options for phased retirement (Galinsky, 2007; Lakin, 2009; Freedman, 2006/7) or the opportunity to share years of experience through mentoring, which may benefit others as well (Howe, 2010; Houck, 2011). The impact of these demographic trends will serve as the basis for discussing knowledge management and succession planning.

Given the rapidly aging workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), the need for succession planning is necessary in order to provide for continuously strong leadership (Ostrowski, 1968). This is especially true in public entities, including education (Reeves, 2010; Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). There are many methods for practicing succession planning, but integrating leadership development provides for the greatest success (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Groves, 2007). Other proven methods include “Grow Your Own Leaders (GYOL)” programs (Reille & Kezar, 2010; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007; Strom, Sanchez & Downey-Schilling, 2011) and mentoring opportunities (Bamford, 2011; Clauson, Wejr, Frost, McRae & Straight, 2010). Mentoring is also a proven record for knowledge transfer (Karkoulian, Halawi & McCarthy, 2008), which leads to the final thread in the literature review.

The history of knowledge management and transfer has been traced from its roots in basic data sharing to its current level of importance in the face of large waves of
retirements (Kasten, 2009; Acsente, 2010; Calo, 2008; Jackson, 2010). Helm-Stevens (2010) provides an overview of knowledge transfer as it applies to a multi-generational workforce, including methods for encouraging the sharing of knowledge within organizations (mentoring being one). While much research is available in regards to the effects of knowledge management programs in other fields, their applicability in education is mostly missing (Wiessner & Sullivan, 2007). This research may help fill the gaps that exist.

The experiences of senior leaders as they transitioned into retirement

![Conceptual Framework Model]

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Model
Definition of Terms

- Generation X – a population subset made up of individuals born from approximately 1965 through 1980. (Gesell, 2010)
- Baby Boomer – a population subset made up of individuals born from 1946 to 1964, as part of the post World War II baby boom. (Gesell, 2010)
- Generation Y – also known as millennials, a population subset made up of individuals born from approximately 1981 through 2000. (Gesell, 2010)
- Knowledge Management – “the process of collecting, codifying, accessing, and transferring the totality of an organization’s knowledge” (Helm-Stevens, 2010)
- Knowledge Transfer – individuals working together to share knowledge to mutual benefit (Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004)
- Succession Planning – the process of developing future leaders for an organization through purposeful action. Future leaders are typically identified from internal resources. (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007)
- Deep Smarts – the “experience, knowledge, skills, and networks...of...professionals and managers” (Aiman-Smith, Bergey, Cantwell & Doran, 2006)
- Senior Administrator - a person serving as a dean, director, vice president, provost, or similar (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2011b)

Assumptions and Limitations

As a researcher, I come to this study with several assumptions about the topics of workforce demographics, succession planning, and knowledge management and transfer. My personal core values of continuous improvement and lifelong learning mean a dedication to document processes, procedures, traditions, and data, and to share
knowledge as much as possible. Facing a loss of history in the organizations I am part of, I seek best practices to make knowledge sharing efficient and effective. However, I understand not everyone has these same values. With that in mind, I understand the criticality of bracketing off my own assumptions and beliefs in conducting unbiased research. While it is difficult to list every one, following are a few key assumptions. I believe:

- It is important to share information and leave a legacy when leaving a job or role
- Institutional knowledge and history provide important context for future success
- Future leaders are at a disadvantage because of a lack of planning around the retirements of older workers
- I believe that in a time of severe budget cuts in the CCCs, it is up to the individual to provide for their own development

I have made the assumption that not many California Community Colleges have knowledge management and transfer plans in place, a point supported by the research of Li, Brake, Champion, Fuller, Gabel, and Hatcher-Busch (2009). I also assume that such a plan does not have priority with many leaders in the senior administrator levels. This assumption is based on the perception that most senior leaders’ workloads cannot be impacted much more beyond the increase seen over the past several years due to budget cuts and position vacancies.

Limitations I anticipated related to this study began with potential difficulty in connecting with retirees based on their busy schedules and possible lack of interest in
participating. Additional limitations were related to interviewees’ potential lack of experience and familiarity with knowledge management and transfer or succession planning, leading to a shortage of rich, usable data. Limiting the ability to generalize results across the larger CCC system is the small population sample size, which is common to qualitative research, but worthy of note.

**Summary**

A knowledge management crisis may be looming for the California Community College system. Decades of deep smarts could be lost as aging workers prepare to retire. To ensure the system’s future success, colleges should find a way to transfer that knowledge before it is gone. Understanding and planning for the coming changes to the workforce may be possible through strategic succession planning and knowledge management. Compiling the lived experiences of retirees in their own words may ultimately lead to the identification of methods and strategies for sharing institutional knowledge.
Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction

As changing workforce demographics lead to significant numbers of potential retirees, California Community Colleges may need to consider the value of succession planning and knowledge transfer strategies in stemming the loss of knowledge that has the potential to put the organizations and their individual employees at a disadvantage in the future. With the “graying of community college leadership,” (Ebbers, Conover & Samuels, 2010), these succession planning and knowledge transfer practices may help colleges retain the deep smarts held by their long time employees. Without a plan, organizations face uncertainty at best, and irreplaceable loss of institutional history and knowledge at worst (Aiman-Smith et al., 2006).

The current and future demographics of an aging and multigenerational workforce frame the need for succession planning and knowledge transfer in the public sector, including higher education (Reeves, 2010; Ebbers et al., 2010; Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). As older employees seek alternatives to traditional retirement, organizations will have an opportunity to implement innovative methods for keeping them engaged, thus counterbalancing a projected shortage of workers (Quinn, 2010; Callanan & Greehaus, 2008; McManus et al., 2007; Galinsky, 2007; Longman, 2010).

The aging workforce and ongoing mass retirements from the baby boomer cohort are outlined in data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Toossi, 2012). The “silver tsunami” that has arrived brings with it the challenges and benefits of a multigenerational workforce, including communication, breaking down stereotypes, and mentoring (Houck, 2011; Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2011; Gesell, 2010; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Galinsky,
The impact of keeping potential retirees in the workforce for longer than anticipated goes hand-in-hand with the future of governmental entitlement programs, including Social Security benefits and education funding (Bennett, 2010; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Myers, 2008/2009; McManus et al., 2007).

With such a changing demographic landscape in the workplace, the necessity and opportunity to implement strategic succession planning become critical. The need to plan for future leaders has been an organizational issue for millennia (Ostrowski, 1968; Reeves, 2010). There are many factors that affect the execution of a succession plan. Buy-in and full support from the president or CEO are critical to a program’s success (McNair, Duree & Ebbers, 2011; Witt/Kieffer, 2008; Groves, 2007; Kesler, 2002). There is also the question of how to develop future leaders and where to find them, whether internally or externally (Strom et al., 2011; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Riggs, 2009; Ebbers et al., 2010; McNair et al., 2011; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006).

Once a succession plan is created, there is tacit and explicit knowledge that need to be shared with the identified future leaders in order to make them successful (Nonaka, 1994; Calo, 2008; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). This literature review looks at the subject of knowledge management and transfer from its history as a means to share simple data, to its current complexity and criticality for the future (Helm-Stevens, 2010). Virtual and traditional methods of knowledge sharing are explored, including mentoring and technology-based platforms (Bamford, 2011; Bennett, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Karkoulian et al., 2008; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006; McNichols, 2010).
Literature Review

The Aging Workforce

Researchers agree on the fact that the impact of the world’s aging population will be profound, and the workplace and workforce of the future will look very different than it has over the past 60+ years (Toossi, 2012; Bright, 2010; Quinn, 2010; Howard & Woodring, 2009; McManus et al., 2007; Galinsky, 2007; Calo, 2007). The baby boomers, as the “pig-in-the-python” that “has overwhelmed every social and governmental institution it has encountered” will impact aging, retirement systems, and healthcare (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). The two generational cohorts that follow, X and Y, face potential shortages in both numbers of workers and funds to support pension obligations that will exist as the baby boomers retire (Szinovacz, 2011; Johnson, 2011; Wolf & Amirkhanyan, 2010; Quinn, 2010; Myers, 2008/2009; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; McManus et al., 2007).

In opposition to the belief that companies will face critical shortages of workers is the data that shows baby boomers remaining in the workforce longer than originally anticipated (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). By remaining on the job later than the traditional retirement age, these potential retirees could instead use the extra years to benefit their organizations and society as a whole, ensuring transfer of their knowledge to those who will take their place. Additionally, by remaining contributing members of the workforce, their impact on social services, pensions, and healthcare will be less (McManus et al., 2007).
There are currently four generations in the workforce, as generation Y has joined Generation X, baby boomers, and traditionalists (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) in a phenomenon that hasn’t been witnessed before. This multigenerational workforce brings its own set of challenges in the realms of interpersonal relationships, technology adoption, and stereotyping (Bright, 2010).

Today’s workplace exhibits the first time this type of generational mix has been present, and while the shift toward the diversity was unusual, the shift away from it will be felt for years to come (Foot & Venne, 2011; Galinsky, 2007; Nyce, 2007). By the year 2020, the entire baby boomer cohort will be over the age of 55, and many of them will still be in the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), though it is projected that retirements will finally begin spiking at that time (Wolf & Amirkhanyan, 2010). Research has shown that the public sector has a greater number of older workers than other segments, with state governments being affected more than federal. Therefore, state-run entities will face a great exodus of employees beginning within a decade (Lewis & Cho, 2011; Wolf & Amirkhanyan, 2010, Bright, 2010; Jacobson, 2010; Henderson, 2008).

The following chart from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) shows the age distribution of the workforce from 1990, projected to 2020. As illustrated, the participation rate of workers over the age of 55 has consistently increased, and should continue to do so through 2020. However, with the aging of the population comes a decline in participation rates by workers under 55, due in part to there being a smaller population of these ages overall.
As the workforce ages, there will be a greater need for maintaining employee wellness, as with age come declines in physical and mental health (Timmons, Hall, Fesko & Migliore, 2011; Longman, 2010). Although older adults generally have more health complaints, research shows those who maintain active participation in work and other intellectually stimulating activities benefit greatly and see fewer declines in health over time (Quinn, 2010; Bank, 2009; Loi & Shultz, 2007; McManus et al., 2007; Freedman, 2006/2007). Employee wellness programs can also benefit the overall productivity of an organization, when employees of all ages have the opportunity to address personal and professional stressors (Timmons et al., 2011; Stewart, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Participation rate</th>
<th>Percentage-point change</th>
<th>Annual rate of change</th>
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<td>66.5</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>64.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 to 24</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>83.5</td>
<td>84.0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30.1</td>
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<td>40.2</td>
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<td>11.3</td>
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<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 79</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Civilian labor force participation rates by age, 1990, 2000, 2010, and projected 2020

[In percent]

Organizations and leaders will face challenges related to managing a multigenerational workforce including communication difficulties and the necessity to alter stereotypes (Houck, 2011; Bright, 2010; Gesell, 2010; Bank, 2009; Galinsky, 2007). Many aging workers will be seeking opportunities for phased retirement and encore careers, providing opportunities for innovative organizations to gain a competitive advantage by accommodating these requests for flexibility (Brown, 2012; Znidarsic, Penger & Dimovski, 2011; Quinn, 2010; Bank, 2009; Freedman, 2006/2007).

Research suggests preferences in communication, expectations, and management styles for each of the different generations (Houck, 2011; Bright, 2010; Znidarsic et al., 2011). Historically, employees on the front end of their careers were seen as a better investment than those approaching retirement, based on a greater chance for return on training and development dollars (Piktialis, 2007). Oftentimes, older workers face stereotypes related to lower productivity levels, a lack of interest in innovation and lifelong learning, and an inability to keep current with technology and training (Foot & Venne, 2011; Lakin, 2009; Moseley & Dessinger, 2008; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). Younger workers can be seen as lacking in social skills and respect for others, driven by money and promotion (Moseley & Dessinger, 2008; Galinsky, 2007). Whether based in perception or reality, organizations and their leaders have to address these types of workplace challenges and stereotypes in order to be successful in meeting strategic goals and moving the organization forward (Znidarsic et al., 2011; Quinn, 2010; Piktialis, 2007).
One method for altering stereotypes and perceptions regarding workers of various ages is mentoring, both traditional and reverse models. This type of employee interaction can also keep individuals engaged in their jobs and promote knowledge transfer (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012; Houck, 2011; Clauson et al., 2011; McNichols, 2010). While mentoring is a method for engaging both older and younger workers, part of its value lies in the social interaction that encourages sharing of ideas, expertise, and know how. Therefore, additional information on mentoring benefits, methods, and strategies will be covered further along in this chapter, under the heading of “knowledge transfer.”

Along with stereotypes of the personalities of each generational cohort has come a general belief about the cost of each employee age group to an organization’s health or bottom line. Historically, aging workers were seen as a liability, and retirement incentive packages were offered in an effort to cut high salary costs in favor of younger, less expensive employees (Helm-Stevens, 2010; Calo, 2008; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008). However, these calculations often failed to take into consideration the knowledge capital contained in the years of experience the older workers possessed (Helm-Stevens, 2010; Calo, 2008; Barnett & Davis, 2008; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006).
Organizations may be forced to make significant changes to their structures, employee support mechanisms, and flexibility in order to entice potential retirees to continue working (Johnson, 2011; Wolf & Amirkhanyan, 2010; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Piktialis, 2007; Calo, 2007; Galinsky, 2007). By encouraging older workers to consider phased retirement and other creative options for encore careers including volunteering, governments and organizations may be able to stem the loss of the aging workforce and its impact that was once seen as a potential crisis (Foot & Venne, 2011; Quinn, 2010; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Galinsky, 2007). It is possible that with little urging, some older workers may choose to stay in the workforce later than the age of 65, and in fact a number of them may never retire (Quinn, 2010).

The demographic factors of the aging workforce and its effect on organizations provide the framework for how succession planning and knowledge transfer strategies need to be understood and implemented. This shift in the work environment suggests a different approach to retirement than what has been the norm for several decades. The research to be conducted in this study will look at whether this phenomenon has emerged in the California Community College setting, and how individuals perceive its effect.

**Succession Planning**

Succession planning is defined as the process of developing future leaders for an organization through purposeful action, with specific application of employee development in order to meet long-term strategic goals of an organization (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007; Reeves, 2010). Succession planning has existed for millennia, from the progression of princes to their inherited place as king in monarchies, to the overthrowing of governments in dictatorships, to the election of vice presidents in a
democracy (Reeves, 2010; Ostrowski, 1968). Above all, succession planning is about continuity of leadership (Ostrowski, 1968).

Ostrowski (1968) was one of the first to write about how to plan for leadership succession. His recommendations call for upper-level management involvement, organizational and individual assessment, continuous activity and planning, and a dynamic method that can be modified as needed. Ostrowski, as with many contemporary researchers (Reeves, 2010; Barnett & Davis, 2008; Groves, 2007; Kesler, 2002), warned against confusing succession planning efforts with what was then called “manpower forecasting” and what could now be called “replacement planning” or “workforce planning”. Ostrowski’s 1968 outline for a succession plan had the makings of a “theory that travels” (Fullan, 2008) and consisted of what are still considered to be the essential components almost 45 years later (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Groves, 2007).

Eerily similar to the need being touted today based on shifting demographics and a pending talent gap (Barnett & Davis, 2008) is Ostrowski’s introduction to the critical need for succession planning:

With the growth of the large, publicly owned corporation, management succession has become a major corporate concern, and properly so, since it is critical to the survival and continuity of a business enterprise. But the greatest impetus for the attention being given to succession planning in recent years is the great and growing shortage of managerial manpower coupled with an increasing difficulty being experienced by corporations in securing the amounts and kinds of talent they have traditionally obtained from the universities. (Ostrowski, 1968, p. 10)

Ostrowski (1968) also defines the need for Human Resources (then called “Personnel”) to assume “a forward looking role” by taking the lead in succession planning efforts and “becoming fully integrated with the corporate planning process.” This concept of Human Resources emerging as a strategic partner through the planning
process has been one that has resurfaced many times over the past few decades and has still not been fully realized (Ulrich & Beatty, 2001; Kesler, 2002).

There is much literature that exists that describes in detail the benefits of succession planning to the overall health of an organization (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Groves, 2007; Kesler, 2002). Within the corporate domain, robust and effective succession planning programs that integrate leadership development best practices are tied to highly successful companies. The return on investment realized through these efforts is positive and well worth the time and resources (Groves, 2007) with organizations that put forth the effort achieving “significant benefits, including improved financial performance” (Barnett & Davis, 2008).

Even with proven results from the corporate sector, public agencies rarely participate in succession planning activities (Reeves, 2010; Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). However, given the demographic shift to an aging workforce and the associated retirements, the public sector is “projected to be severely affected” and in many cases, the next generation of leaders is being left unprepared (Reeves, 2010). This lack of planning and preparation is true in colleges and universities as well (Witt/Kieffer, 2008). Within higher education, community colleges face an especially difficult road ahead. The immense growth of these public institutions in the 1960s, which led to the hiring of large numbers of baby boomers, now means those same large numbers of potential retirees (Campbell, Syed & Morris, 2010).

Riggs (2009) takes the data related to succession planning and applies it to the world of the community college, speaking to the need to “undergo significant change in order to stay viable in the future.” According to the results of a Presidents/Trustees
survey by Witt/Kieffer (2008), higher education institutions have only recently begun to
realize the importance of succession planning to their organizations, and the cultural shift
that will accompany the change toward this planning is overdue. By implementing the
concepts around succession planning, they stand to benefit through an increasingly
diverse workforce and greater efficiency and effectiveness (Fulton-Calkins & Milling,
2005).

The role of the president/CEO in championing succession planning is critical to a
program’s success (Groves, 2007; Kesler, 2002), and 74% of respondents in a 2008
Witt/Kieffer survey indicated a presence of succession planning in some form at their
institutions. While these numbers appear to be growing (Witt/Kieffer, 2008; Weisman &
Vaughan, 2007), without a visible and engaged president or CEO championing
succession planning, these activities have the potential to be viewed as non-critical to the
strategic direction of the institution, and will not have the priority necessary for success
(Groves, 2007). An additional challenge comes when a leader lacks confidence in their
organization’s plans and finds them to be ineffective, creating additional problems around
successful implementation (Barnett & Davis, 2008).

Succession planning, through a demonstrated commitment to identifying future
leaders, is critical for college presidents, and community colleges in particular (Strom,
Sanchez & Downey-Schilling, 2011; Ebbers, Conover, and Samuels, 2010). Developing a
Grow-Your-Own-Leaders or GYOL program is one leadership development strategy that
can be implemented internally at the organizational level (Reille & Kezar, 2010; Violino,
2012).
Grow Your Own Leaders (GYOL) programs are a means of keeping the development of future leaders within the control of an organization. The programs can involve many different types of offerings, but they should be personalized to the unique culture and structure of the organization (Reille & Kezar, 2010; Riggs, 2009). These types of programs are seen as an important piece of the leadership development puzzle, with 43% of respondents to The Community College Presidency: 2006 survey indicating they sponsored a GYOL program (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007).

Benefits of a GYOL program include the ability to customize content to the culture, values, mission, and unique setting of an individual college. Potential drawbacks of internal programs are often related to a lack of tie-in to established competencies and a lack of planning and needs assessment (Reille & Kezar, 2010). Without thoughtful care being exercised to avoid bias throughout the creation and implementation of a GYOL program, institutions risk growing new leaders who maintain the institution as it is, with ingrained bad habits and an aversion to change (Riggs, 2009; Reille & Kezar, 2010). Without diversity, organizational culture may continue to support dysfunctional structures and processes (Senge, 2006).

Diversification can include not only the traditionally held fields of gender and ethnicity, but also bringing in new strategic thinking perspectives by reaching out to potential future leaders from a cross-section of an organization and from external sources (Groves, 2007; Witt/Kieffer, 2008). The American Council on Education (ACE) announced the Spectrum Initiative in 2009 with the goal of preparing women and minority administrators through succession planning, mentoring, and leadership development (Spectrum Initiative, 2009).
Community Colleges in California serve over 2.6 million students annually (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2012), and are seen as an economic engine in the state. Given their role in changing the lives of students through education, high-quality leadership at all levels of the 112 individual community colleges is important to consider, well into the 21st century. It will be critical that these leaders embrace change and alter the status-quo in order to transform their organizations beyond the static levels they currently inhabit (Strom et al., 2011; Wallin, 2010; Riggs, 2009; Sullivan, 2004).

With the coming wave of retirements in senior leadership positions at California Community Colleges (CCCs), there will be opportunities for advancement by those who are prepared to lead (Strom et al., 2011). With the budget cuts that have been implemented over the past several years, the cost and time associated with professional development can end up falling to the individual (Reeves, 2010; Ebbers, Conover & Samuels, 2010). However, it is in an institution’s best interest to make training opportunities available to employees (Strom et al., 2011; McNair, 2010; Riggs, 2009; Ebbers et al., 2010).

The need for leadership development as a component of succession planning has reached a critical point for community colleges, specifically at levels from middle managers to vice presidents (Strom et al., 2011; Sypawka, Mallett & McFadden, 2010; Wallin, 2006). While there are many opportunities for professional development, it is important to realize that every college is different and there isn’t a single set of skills and abilities required for a given administrative level across different colleges (McNair et al., 2011; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Wallin, 2006). In addition, while many people choose
similar paths to the top, there is great variance among individual backgrounds and experiences (Weisman & Vaughan, 2007).

Succession planning can take many forms, depending on the structure of an organization and the urgency felt by its leadership in the face of projected employee turnover. Regardless of the methods chosen for addressing future workforce needs, future leaders need to be given the opportunity to gain knowledge about the organization. In researching the experiences of recent retirees, these systems for succession planning and leadership development will frame interview questions and provide context for knowledge transfer methods.

**Knowledge Management and Transfer**

The search for knowledge has been the focus of academic and philosophical quests for centuries. An additional question that accompanies the search for knowledge is how to gather it from others, or share it once it has been acquired (Holton & Yamkovenko, 2008; Bogdanowicz & Bailey, 2002; Nonaka, 1994). There are two types of knowledge that exist: tacit and explicit. Each type has unique qualities, but the conversion of one type to the other in usable form and between individuals is the focus of innovation and knowledge management (Nonaka, 1994).

The identified differences between tacit and explicit knowledge focus on accessibility and the ability to document each. Explicit knowledge tends to be specific and concerned with methodology and processes. It is easily documented and because of this, can be shared with others in many forms, including in writing and illustration (Nonaka, 1994). Explicit knowledge is usually the focus of workshops, courses, and
training that describe expected actions and procedures in specific situations (Aiman-Smith et al., 2006).

Tacit knowledge is more difficult to record and tends to be more closely held by individuals (Jackson, 2010; Calo, 2008). Oftentimes, tacit knowledge is a combination of a person’s mental models and experiences and how the two intertwine to contribute to action in a given situation. It is the application of connectivity of otherwise unrecorded or unrelated events that leads to decisions and action toward a problem or challenge (Wallin, 2006). Because seemingly insignificant factors may play into the application of tacit knowledge, it is nearly impossible to document each of them. In fact, even if given the opportunity and ability to document tacit knowledge, an individual may not realize the full scope of the tacit knowledge they possess, or how one piece contributes to another (Jackson, 2010; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006).

To illustrate the differences between tacit and explicit knowledge is the example of writing music for a classical symphony. There are certain musical theories that can be taught that explain the process of movement from one set of notes to another, illustrating explicit knowledge. However, the tacit knowledge behind the creation of the story and emotion in the music is not easily teachable. Tacit knowledge extends from personal experience and ability (Jackson, 2010; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006), and marks the difference between composers whose music endures for centuries and their peers, whose music may be quickly lost over time.

General information on knowledge management and transfer provides a basis for understanding the importance of this practice for the future workforce (Calo, 2008). With many definitions to describe this process, Helm-Stevens (2010) provides an
understandable and translatable overview. Knowledge is different than information (Nonaka, 1994), in the fact that “information becomes knowledge when it is understood, manipulated and can become tied to a purpose or idea” (Helm-Stevens, 2010), though the two are often used interchangeably (Nonaka, 1994). The changing definition of knowledge management can be traced from its roots in information and data collection to its importance in “enhancing company performance” (Helm-Stevens, 2010).

With the changing demographics of the workforce, knowledge management becomes critical to organizational development going forward (Jackson, 2010; Helm-Stevens, 2010). Calo (2008) warns organizations to maintain a focus on knowledge transfer, even if the possibility of aging workers staying in their jobs longer means less urgency in the coming knowledge loss. In addition, in times of economic uncertainty, when organizations may find it easier to offer retirement incentives, it is imperative to develop strategies to gather knowledge before retirees leave.

Knowledge is intangible and difficult to measure, but its benefit to organizations as a competitive advantage has been well documented (Helm-Stevens, Brown, & Russell, 2011; Calo, 2008; Shults, 2008; Karkoulian et al., 2008; Syed-Ikhsan & Rowland, 2004). Unfortunately, as described by Acsente (2010) the flaw of knowledge management as a concept is that there doesn’t seem to be a way to separate the knowledge from the individual. The two are inherently linked (Nonaka, 1994).

Early in the industrial age, organizational knowledge tended toward the explicit, as machinery and process took precedence over the people working them. The shift toward tacit knowledge as an organizational component came as machinery and process work became increasingly automated and the knowledge worker emerged. With this
emergence came the realization that more knowledgeable workers could lead to a stronger organization, through differentiation (Acsente, 2010).

Thus, the challenge of transferring and managing knowledge becomes an even greater issue for organizations (Shults, 2008). Researchers disagree not only over the best methods for doing so, but also whether it is even possible to manage or transfer knowledge as an intangible asset (Jackson, 2010; Calo, 2008; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). While there may not be any one best method, there are several factors that contribute to successful implementation of a knowledge management strategy (McNichols, 2010).

First on the list of important success factors is support at the highest levels of the organization. As with many plans, if employees don’t think it is important to leadership, they are less likely to adopt it. Related to this buy-in is a culture that allows for the time and flexibility to store and transfer knowledge, as well as the financial resources for both (McNichols, 2010; Kasten, 2009). Some individuals may choose to document knowledge related to their positions and the organization as a whole, based on self-motivation and individual autonomy (Nonaka, 1994). However, without the necessary resources and supportive culture, the knowledge will eventually be lost (Li et al., 2009).

Other barriers to knowledge management include a lack of both trust and established relationships, as well as different mental models on the part of those sharing knowledge. One successful method for knowledge transfer involves the social piece of relationships. Knowledge is difficult to share, but, when given the opportunity to do so in teams and other social settings, the process becomes easier (McNichols, 2010; Holton & Yamkovenko, 2008).
A drawback to team participation leading to successful sharing is related to the belief that knowledge is power. Because of potential threats that may be felt, or desire on the part of individuals to maintain or grow their power, the process of knowledge transfer may come up against additional barriers (Jackson, 2010; Kasten, 2009; Li et al., 2009).

There may be many obstacles to knowledge transfer, but mentoring continues to be proven a successful means of sharing information (McNichols, 2010; Wiessner & Sullivan, 2007; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). With this in mind, it may be no surprise that mentoring is often listed a best practice method for establishing knowledge sharing relationships between individuals. Karkoulian, Halawi, and McCarthy (2008) examine the relationship between knowledge management and mentoring. Their work notes the critical need for interpersonal relationships and communication between individuals from different generational cohorts in support of the knowledge transfer process.

While mentoring can be beneficial, its costs can discourage organizations from establishing formal programs (Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). As time and monetary resources continue to be a premium for workers, using new and different strategies to share information is a great use of the resources that actually are available (Jackson, 2010; Bennett, 2010; McNichols, 2010). E-mentoring and “legacy mentor” programs are other ways to look at knowledge sharing and transfer. Bamford (2011) looks at the use of e-mentoring strategies as a means to improve leadership development through mentoring while reducing money and time spent.

With generational differences often part of the mentoring equation (Bogdanowicz & Bailey, 2002), opportunities may arise to mine knowledge from long-term, older employees, while harnessing the energy and technology familiarity possessed by younger
employees. This may be accomplished by pairing baby boomers with members of Generation X or Y and utilizing both traditional and reverse mentoring models (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2011; Bamford, 2011; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006).

One example of generational based mentoring is illustrated by Clauson, Wejr, Frost, McRae, and Straight (2011), who define “legacy mentors” as individuals aged 55 or older who have a vast amount of experience and insight to share with others in an organization. Oftentimes, legacy mentors are approaching retirement and the transfer of their knowledge to others is critical to the organization going forward. Clauson et al. (2011) structured their study to give individual nurses who fit the legacy mentor category the opportunity to share their knowledge and skills with younger nurses. This knowledge transfer occurred through development of projects, workshops, and reference materials, and creation of one-to-one mentoring relationships. The project was created as a means of stemming the tide of retirements from the nursing segment of the healthcare field and many of the mentor nurses were so reinvigorated that they chose to remain in their careers longer than planned. The authors recommend translating this study to other fields to determine if legacy mentoring would have the same positive benefits. Education may certainly fit this suggestion for future research.

Li, Brake, Champion, Fuller, Gabel, and Hatcher-Busch (2009) illustrate through their research a few differences between academic and non-academic organizations in the approach to knowledge management. While academic institutions tend to see themselves as “learning organizations,” this can be due in part to the service provided to students, not based on the fact that they have systems in place for knowledge sharing between employees. Additionally, the educational organizations that were part of the study lacked
financial resources and support from top leadership in the quest for knowledge sharing as a business strategy. While this may not be the case for all academic entities, it does illustrate potential challenges to implementing knowledge management strategies within academia.

Higher education institutions are, by their very nature, focused around knowledge management and transfer, most notably between faculty and students. However, institutionalizing the practice beyond the classroom into the operational functions of the organization is a more difficult quest (Li et al., 2009). Those colleges and universities that find ways to leverage intellectual capital gain strategic advantage over their competitors (Helm-Stevens, Brown, & Russell, 2011; Shults, 2008).

With little in the way of information on successful knowledge management and transfer strategies in the community college setting, some research suggests the American Association of Community College (AACC) Core Competencies for Community College Leaders may be useful in starting a dialogue on what information is important for future leaders to know. These competencies cover both tacit and explicit areas of leadership development and may also help colleges set effective strategies for addressing unmet needs or shortcomings (Boyle, 2011; McNair et al., 2011; McNair, 2010; Wiessner & Sullivan, 2007, Wallin, 2006). Competency areas include organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism (American Association of Community Colleges, 2005).

The role of a mentor in the success of many community college presidents speaks to the importance of finding a mentor (for individuals seeking personal development) and making mentor opportunities available to employees (for organizations establishing
leadership development and succession planning programs) (Reille & Kezar, 2010; McNair et al., 2011; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007; Riggs, 2009; Ebbers et al., 2010; Amey, 2006). The formalization of the mentor process is not as important as the opportunity to have someone to observe who provides guidance and feedback (Groves, 2007). For their part, a majority of current leaders are paying the mentoring relationship forward, with 54% of college president respondents indicating a formal mentor relationship with an aspiring leader (Weisman and Vaughan, 2007).

The basis of this research study is the lived experiences of individuals, as they transitioned from full-time positions into retirement. Having an understanding of the benefits and methods of knowledge management and transfer will assist in analyzing how the described experiences apply to this practice. There is also a benefit inherent in knowing the language of a particular topic and being aware when it presents itself.

**Summary**

As the demographics of the workplace continue to shift in the years ahead, older adults may remain in their jobs for longer than traditionally expected. This change may assist higher education institutions and younger generations of workers combat shortages in the size and skill of the labor force. With groups of employees from multiple generations at work in community colleges, challenges may arise, including communication difficulties, conflict, and stereotypes. By offering wellness, development, and mentoring opportunities to all staff members regardless of age, organizations may actually benefit from the challenges instead of suffering.

Succession planning is suggested as a means of addressing the retirements of the older adult workers that will eventually happen, regardless of employees staying on the
job longer. Identification and development of future community college leaders is an important component of succession planning, whether externally through competency identification, or internally through GYOL programs.

Once future college leaders are identified, organizations can provide for the establishment of social relationships through mentoring and a supportive, communicative culture. This type of environment can be helpful in transferring tacit and explicit knowledge that is held by potential retirees to future leaders.

Organizations that develop strategies to address each of these areas of workforce planning may gain a competitive advantage. Public entities, including higher education, while not traditionally part of the succession planning and knowledge management movements, can utilize these strategies to become more successful in these difficult economic times. Community colleges are especially ripe for long-term intellectual strategy implementation, as they face higher retirement potential than some other public institutions.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The primary goal in performing this study was to identify the knowledge transfer experiences of a group of former California Community College system employees, as these individuals transitioned from senior leadership roles into retirement. It is important to understand their experiences, because, as the largest portion of today’s workforce retires, much of their experience and knowledge, an organization’s deep smarts may be lost (Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). Being able to capture and leverage retirees’ knowledge and experience could mean future competitive advantage (Calo, 2008).

The research questions to be answered are:

- What were the experiences of individuals from the California Community College system, as they transitioned from senior leadership roles into retirement?
- What were the retirees’ experiences with knowledge transfer and succession planning “before” formally announcing their retirement?
- What were the retirees’ experiences with knowledge transfer and succession planning “after” formally announcing their retirement?

A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized by interviewing retired community college leaders. These leaders were from varied backgrounds and experience levels. This chapter describes in detail the population studied, and also provides specific research methods, design, and rationale. A timeline of research activities is included, in addition to a list of ethical considerations that could have impacted the study.
Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative research study focuses on the lived experiences of individuals who have retired from senior leadership roles in California Community Colleges. The researcher sought to explore, and ultimately understand, how these former leaders shared and transferred the experiential-based knowledge they possess. The depth of the tacit knowledge these individuals possess may be most effectively discovered through a qualitative approach. Open-ended research questions allowed participants to frame responses from the context of their own mental models, without unintended bias from the researcher.

Creswell (2008) describes qualitative inquiry as “an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (p. 213). While each individual brings their own definition of reality to the description of an experience, common phenomena can emerge when stories are compared for their root themes (Creswell, 2006). Translating the multiple realities of an ontological stance through a methodological lens led this researcher to the phenomenological approach.

In phenomenology, unifying phenomena are identified through gathering the stories of individuals’ lived experiences and comparing them for common themes (Creswell, 2006). Moustakas (1994) identifies phenomenology as a method to allow individuals to go back to experiences and determine meaning. This approach references the philosophy of Edmund Husserl in intertwining objective knowledge with subjective knowledge in order to identify essence and meaning. The practice of phenomenology as described by Moustakas encourages individuals to be present to themselves and to things in the world. In this method, Epoché is utilized by researchers in order to bracket off and
set aside their own experiences and biases and refrain from judgment while observing the world around them. The description of phenomenology as a “logical, systematic and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis…” (Moustakas, 1994) appeals to this researcher’s pragmatic approach to gathering data. With a desire to understand how many unique and individual experiences give depth and context to common themes, the specific method of phenomenology was chosen.

**Site and Population**

**Population Description**

The population chosen for study in this research was made up of retired California Community College senior leaders/administrators. These individuals had retired from the system within the recent ten years, though they may still have been working in other arenas. There were seven people selected from this population to be part of the study. Due to the small sample size of this qualitative study, the findings and results may not be transferable to the general population of CCCs.

The range of educational leadership experience covered by those in the target population is years to decades. Retirement status and position(s) held are the defining characteristics of the group, with other demographic information (race, ethnicity, gender) being identified but not factored into the basis of the research. Due to the definition of retirement around the concept of a specific (older) age, this also becomes a characteristic of the population.

The professional paths taken by the research subjects were varied, and, while some of this personal history is covered briefly in the interview questions’ content, formative experiences were not the focus of this study. Senior leadership/administrative
positions held by the population include those from vice president down to associate dean, including director. Former presidents/chancellors are not being considered as part of the population due to the depth of research already in existence regarding those positions. However, some members of the population may have held the position of president or chancellor on an interim basis at some point in their careers, a common practice in community colleges (Riggs, 2009). Titles are not in and of themselves indicative of a position’s status as “senior” because of the impact of size and district structure on the administrative reporting structures of each college. For example, deans of smaller colleges may have similar responsibilities for supervision and reporting as vice presidents at larger colleges.

**Site Description**

With the population for this study comprised of retirees who were no longer a part of the California Community College system within northern California, there was not one specific site that was present in the research. However, a brief description of the system as a whole is presented for reference.

The California Community College system is made up of 112 individual colleges, in 72 districts, geographically dispersed throughout the state. There is a general governance structure provided for this public education entity through California Education Code and the state legislature. The California Community College Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) and Board of Governors are in place to provide advocacy, guidance, and programmatic approval to the colleges. However, specific initiatives and strategic planning fall to the individual colleges and their individual governing boards of trustees.
Staffing levels of faculty, staff, and administrators vary from site to site with student population and college or district size being a determining factor (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, 2011b). Depth of senior leadership is also attributable to these factors, as smaller colleges opt for one-deep management structures, while larger districts may have separate college and district administrative staff.

Site Access

Since those being interviewed were retired and not an active part of a college staff, access to the research population was determined by the availability of these individuals. While there were potentially fewer challenges in working with individuals as opposed to organizations, there were still accessibility issues that may have impacted the study. One challenge of access was difficulty in ascertaining initial contact information for the retirees. With the snowball sampling method that was used for developing the research population, one limitation was the loss of active communication the participants had with co-workers who may have fit the research population. There were also issues around identifying acceptable communication options and preferred methods of contact (email, telephone, and social media). These challenges were mitigated through networking and identification of individuals willing to commit to participation in the process via personal contacts, developing contacts over time with the assistance many individuals and their extended networks.

Research Methods

Description of Each Method Used

In assembling the phenomenological research, the following data collection instruments were used for triangulation of results:
- Qualitative interviews
- Field notes

**Qualitative interviews**

**Instrument description.** A set of open-ended, semi-structured questions were drafted as a starting point for conducting qualitative interviews. These questions wove together information gathered from the literature review and sought to delve deeper into those areas identified as themes or gaps in prior research. Once the questions were drafted and reviewed for their structure and relevance, a pilot interview was completed and reviewed, and the interviews were conducted. If the researcher found that the interviewee had additional information to add beyond the scope of the predetermined questions, then follow-up questions were added as needed. An open-ended question concluded the session, in order to allow for any additional comments by the interviewee that were not covered in the formally structured questioning. Follow-up interviews which the researcher thought may be necessary based on time available with participants or depth of content garnered in the initial interview, were not needed.

**Participant selection.** Participants were selected based on the fact that they had retired within the most recent ten years from a California Community College. The researcher’s personal network of mentors and former colleagues were utilized, via personal conversation, email, and phone, in order to identify a pool of individuals within the identified population. This initial contact was followed by a snowball sampling method which was expanded as needed to identify additional potential participants. Final selection of interviewees was based on response to invitations and their interest in participation.
Identification and invitation. Personal contact was made (via phone, email, and in-person) with each participant and hour-long, face-to-face interviews were scheduled around their availability, with care made not to inconvenience them. Interview questions were shared in advance, in order to allow the participants to reflect on their experiences. Formal thanks were given upon completion of the interviews, and copies of the final research report made available to participants.

Data collection. Data was collected by use of a digital recording device from which to transcribe the conversation, with a back-up device in place at all times. In addition, the interviewer took brief notes on the interview environment and, when possible, mannerisms of the interviewees, in order to add visual and auditory dimensions to the transcribed notes.

Field notes

Instrument description. During the qualitative interviews, the researcher recorded close observations of nonverbal cues and actions on the part of the interviewees. Notes were made in regards to how these actions tied into the responses being given by the subjects. This additional detail provided a richer description of context within the interview transcriptions.

Participant selection. Field notes were recorded with as much detail as possible, and were selected not only for their impact on the context as assumed at the time of the interview, but even subtle, seemingly less important observations, were detailed as well.

Identification and invitation. Participants were given an overview of the field notes process, including the fact that the researcher would be documenting written observations in addition to the audio recordings described in the interview portion.
**Data collection.** Data was collected in writing in a field notebook. Brief comments describing the interview environment and mannerisms of the interviewee aided in adding visual and various intangible dimensions to the transcribed notes.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Once the audio segment of each interview was transcribed, observations in the field notes were matched up and added in to create a rich perspective on the content. Written notes were analyzed in the context of the whole interview, with coding and categorization as described below. Artifacts provided additional depth and breadth to the data throughout the coding process.

According to Saldaña (2009), there is no one “right” way to analyze and code data, and it is beneficial to be open during the data collection process to any method that may emerge as appropriate to the study. Saldaña refers to his personal stance as “pragmatic eclecticism,” which also resonates with the researcher’s own philosophical approach. Openness to potential coding methods and analysis is encouraged, along with a list to start from based off the conceptual framework and methodology.

The researcher looks at the coding process as the most important to the full research cycle, and spent a number of days processing the raw data to arrive at the themes that emerged. Simultaneous coding was employed through the use of both structural and descriptive coding, with each type lending itself to the phenomenological approach. The researcher also utilized the holistic method, at times processing data as a whole story, and at others going line-by-line through the interview transcripts and field notes. Once the recursive coding progression was complete, the coding data was grouped by theme, referred to as “Themeing the Data” (Saldaña, 2009). This process allowed themes to
begin to emerge as the data unfolded, with short descriptive phrases appropriate in the coding.

After themes were identified and recorded, second cycle coding methods were used to continue grouping the coded data into related threads. With each level of analysis and alignment, narrow themes were grouped into broader topics until three main themes emerged. The themes were then fleshed out into descriptive, data-rich phenomena. The cyclical, repetitive process of coding and recoding the data over the course of several iterations, led to categories and subcategories within the themes that emerged (Saldaña, 2009).
Stages of Data Collection

Upon approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Drexel University, the research process began. Starting with the recruitment of participants in February, 2013, data was collected according to the Research Timeline in Figure 2.

Interview questions were drafted and reviewed for content, context, and clarity. The questions were then be vetted in an applied setting through a pilot interview. The pilot interview allowed for additional feedback to be given by the interviewees for revisions to the final interview questions. The complete interviews began in March 2013 and progressed through March and April. Coding and transcription began immediately, based on interviewer observations and emerging themes. Data analysis was completed and chapters four and five written based on the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Doctoral committee proposal review and approval</td>
<td>December 5, 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRB Certification via Drexel University</td>
<td>February 26, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research phase begins</td>
<td>February 27, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of Interview Questions</td>
<td>February 27, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment of Participants</td>
<td>February 27, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot Interview</td>
<td>March 5, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revise Interview Questions as needed</td>
<td>March 6, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct Qualitative Interviews</td>
<td>March 11, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Begin Coding</td>
<td>March 11, 2013</td>
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<td>Begin Transcription</td>
<td>March 13, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>April 17, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete Chapters 4 and 5 of the dissertation</td>
<td>April 17-May 6, 2013</td>
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<td>Dissertation Committee Review</td>
<td>May 17, 2013</td>
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Figure 2: Research Timeline
Ethical Considerations

This research study focused on individuals’ experiences in transitioning out of senior leadership positions in California Community Colleges (CCCs), and as such was based heavily on human contact and perception. Data was gathered through personal interviews conducted by the researcher, and this was where potential ethical issues may have arisen.

Due to the types of questions being asked in the interviews, which focus on personal experiences and employment, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought from Drexel University. This approval sought to ensure protection of the research subjects and the confidentiality of their responses. Once IRB approval was granted, the researcher moved forward with the process of informed consent. Interviewees were presented with a consent form that was reviewed in detail prior to requesting their signature verifying agreement to participate. This active process allowed for any questions or concerns to be addressed up front. If potential interviewees were not comfortable with the consent form, the interview process would have ended and other subjects would have been pursued.

During the interview process, the researcher tried to make sure the participants were completely comfortable, both physically and emotionally, in addressing the questions asked. Instructions were given at the beginning of the interview so that if participants were feeling uncomfortable, they could choose not to answer a question, or could end the interview at any point. At the conclusion of the interview process, the data gathered was analyzed and reported in such a way as to protect the confidentiality and privacy of each participant. In addition, careful attention was paid to the manner in which
individual colleges and districts are portrayed, so as not to do harm to their reputations or staff. This was accomplished through the use of pseudonyms, and redaction of specific institutions from quotes that are included in subsequent chapters.

In addition to the physical and emotional factors involved in the interview process itself, there could have been potential for psychological factors to emerge. These would have been based on the impact of the retirement process on the individual participants. Depending on the circumstances around each person’s retirement from the community college, there could be issues around their adjustment to retirement (Taylor, Goldberg, Shore & Lipka, 2008). Focusing on this part of their experience could lead to the emergence of psychosocial variables (Wong & Earl, 2009), that had not been factored in to the interview process.
Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

Introduction

This chapter describes the findings of the study, as well as the synthesis of the results through interpretation by the researcher within the context of the three research streams from the Literature Review. Where possible, findings are presented in the participants’ own words, taken from interview transcriptions and enhanced with field observations and the use of thick, rich description. As outlined in the methodology section, the participants’ identities are kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and removal of identifying content within the interview transcripts. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings, results, and interpretations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the knowledge transfer experiences of a group of individuals as they transitioned into retirement from California Community College senior leadership roles. It is important to understand these experiences, because as the baby boomers, the largest population of today’s workforce, retire, much of their experience and knowledge, an organization’s “deep smarts” could be lost (Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). This loss of institutional history could place the California Community Colleges (CCCs) and their future leaders in the critical position of trying to make up for decades worth of lost knowledge, which, once gone, is nearly impossible to fully recover (Calo, 2008).

Research Questions

What were the experiences of individuals from the California Community College system, as they transitioned from senior leadership roles into retirement?
What were the retirees’ experiences with knowledge transfer and succession planning “before” formally announcing their retirement?

What were the retirees’ experiences with knowledge transfer and succession planning “after” formally announcing their retirement?

**Findings**

In phenomenology, unifying phenomena are identified through gathering the stories of individuals’ lived experiences and comparing them for common themes (Creswell, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were conducted, allowing seven retired individuals to share their lived experiences over the course of their careers and into their retirement. Moustakas (1994) identifies phenomenology as a method to allow individuals to go back to experiences and determine meaning. Upon review of the raw transcription data through the coding process described by Saldaña as “pragmatic eclecticism” (2009), three major themes emerged, each encompassing succession planning through knowledge management and transfer within the California Community College setting 1) Succession Planning as a Process, 2) The Context of Succession Planning, and 3) The Means of Succession Planning. Each of these major themes has subthemes that support the overarching phenomena and will be described in detail in this section. *Figure 3* provides an outline of these three major themes and introduces the subthemes that support them.
**Succession Planning as a Process**

Study participants provided an overview of organizational preparation and knowledge of succession planning, specifically its implementation within the public setting of the California Community College. In addition, they gave insights into various tools and factors for implementing succession planning, such as job design, salary, position-specific aspects, and challenges that may arise. The second piece of the process described by participants was the personal journey taken by individuals on the employment spectrum from the hiring process through retirement.
Organizational Knowledge and Preparation. When participants were asked about how their former organizations had prepared for succession, their responses were for the most part that the community colleges had done nothing to prepare, or that they “do a terrible job” (Phyllis). No one could speak to a formal plan within their institutions, although they agreed there may have had a plan of which they were unaware (Phyllis, Wallace, Harvey). “There was no formal one that I can think of” (Wallace). Most agreed succession planning is a “huge issue” (Elnore) and is seriously needed. Elnore’s comment sums up the issue best, with a flippant “well how ‘bout some?”, followed by “well, yeah, I suppose it’s not funny.” Harvey spoke to the issue overall saying:

I really do believe that the community colleges need to be strong advocates for succession planning. Not just in their colleges but for the whole system. Because quite frankly I’ve sat in on hundreds of interviews for faculty, as well as managers. There’s a dearth of people who are knowledgeable. (Harvey)

Reasons for the lack of planning range from a lack of knowledge on the subject to a lack of action. Both Jake and Leona brought up the fact that just because “we had talked about” (Jake) succession planning will within the community college environment, doesn’t mean there is a plan in place that is actually being followed “and we had been talking about it, and talking about how to groom faculty. But there was no formal plan in place” (Leona). With that in mind comes the recommendation that institutions “quit talking about it and realize the value” (Elnore). In Leona’s case, a fellow dean’s doctoral studies on the issue brought it to the forefront of discussion within the Dean’s Council “and it was probably because of her research we talked about it in our Dean’s meetings. But our institution did not have a plan” (Leona). Although again, just because it was being discussed didn’t mean a plan of action came to fruition.
There were several factors that came up as important pieces for implementation of a succession plan. The first was that “it has to be all the way to the top I mean to get that support in order to do this” (Wallace) and “leadership needs to model the behavior” (Elnore). The second was reflection on the fact that some organizations tend to “make it a burden” (Elnore), by adding it in to an already full plate of duties. They also “don’t provide the support and training to have people truly understand how to do it and then I don’t think they see how it’s used” (Elnore). A lack of training and understanding of the process coupled with a lack of timing and fit led to the work becoming a useless exercise. The recommended response to this challenge was to give people the tools necessary to do the job properly, to hold them accountable, and allow them to judge their own progress over time, understanding that it may be painful to get it right, but that the results would be worth it in the end.

and so that’s that burden piece of it in my mind. It’s like give me a useless exercise and I’m gonna give you what you asked for. A useless answer. And and so if you could help people see the value and then also have them realize that that they’re held accountable, but that it’s a good filter and a guide for them to use. It’s valuable to me to have done this. I can use it, I can see it, I can judge my progress. I can make formative adjustment as I go through the year and I can look back on the year and say yeah okay I accomplished this or I didn’t (Elnore)

In addition to a lack of succession plans within the represented institutions, there were no formal emergency vacancy replacement plans in place either. Jake, Harvey, Alice, and Wallace explained that their colleges drew from the internal talent pool that existed. Jake spoke with confidence that there were a great many highly qualified internal candidates at one of his former institutions, “we knew that we were gonna have a bunch of people who were talented enough to take on that position” (Jake). However a lack of talent at another meant a variety of problems when it came to emergency replacement
“now if you have a place that doesn’t have much talent, that’s a problem” (Jake). In Wallace’s case, the organization chart served as an informal tool for emergency succession, with direct reports or retirees helping fill the vacant positions as necessary. Harvey stated “we tried to get someone who would not be applying for the job,” although “we would try and identify perhaps a faculty member who had the skills and capability and that you know the personality to become an interim manager” (Harvey).

The process of succession planning in public institutions is somewhat difficult and “not really appropriate” (Alice). Some individuals within the system base their interpretation of succession planning in the community college environment on affirmative action and diversity issues

there’s a lot of people that are against that, and they use affirmative action has a reason. You can’t you know handpick people and blah blah blah. Although I’ll put my record of hiring of a diverse people under me against anybody (Phyllis)

Jake explained,

but in terms of planning for a succession plan, did we say we want a younger person? I mean you can kind of say that, behind closed doors, but you can’t say that formally. (Jake)

showing the difference between private realities and the public perception. Wallace discussed the fact that “I trained those that I worked with as best they could,” (Wallace) assuming they would still be there even if they didn’t get the job. In some cases, though public hiring processes prescribe it, positions are never opened to the public, with lateral transfers and reorganizations providing the means to bypass the process (Leona).

While organizations as a whole may not have clear processes or understanding of succession planning, the participants described a number of individual factors that were at work in the colleges. When asked what kind of succession planning was described or
expected by the organization through the job description and assignments, Elnore’s response was “instructed to do? Practically nothing.” However, her personal philosophy was that the work needed to get done and so “I assigned it to myself.” Harvey spoke of a former supervisor who had “taken that on as as something that she wants to have happen” (Harvey). Upon reflection, Wallace realized that because he had not been asked to document information, “I guess a lot of that was in my head,” while many others (Phyllis, Harvey) had documented things in files, binders, and “on paper” (Jake), mostly of their own accord. In addition, a few “grants prescribed what needed to happen, you know, at least on an annual basis” (Elnore) and the accreditation based planning process provided some annual planning tools and timelines.

**Succession Planning Factors and Tools.** While little existed in the way of formal plans within the institutions as mentioned by participants, there were various factors that played into a few of the informal pieces that did exist. In some cases, specific positions had succession plans in place for them, even if informal. Both Jake and Alice described the fact that some positions need provisions for knowledge transfer, specifically in the case where only one person holds a particular title “that’s one you really have to plan succession because there’s, that’s like a one-man operation that nobody knows. That person knows, has knowledge that virtually no one else has” (Jake). This can be the case with the president (Elnore), or in one example the public information officer (Alice). Multiple people holding similar jobs means less criticality for succession planning and knowledge transfer “many of the other positions multiple people hold and it was not quite the same thing” (Jake), and some positions don’t have as much information or knowledge to transfer
and I think a lot of it depends on the position itself. You know some of your positions you can leave, there is not much you have to say because you are gone. But some of the positions I do think that they ought to make provisions to make sure that the incoming employee has numerous opportunities to talk with the person that left and I think it’s in everybody’s best interest to. (Alice)

Individual job design may also factor into the position-specific succession planning. Both Alice and Harvey spoke of the need to learn from what wasn’t working in a particular position “they decided that wasn’t that wasn’t working so then they actually start made dean position out of that” (Alice) and create new positions or revise current ones through evaluation. This could happen to the hiring process (Alice) or through an exit interview with the retiree “would you like to share some of the things about your job to see if we want to rearrange it or? Or do some other kind of things?” (Harvey).

However, in Harvey’s case

the school is pretty traditional about how they viewed, how the upper management viewed management positions and what they’re gonna do with them. You know it’s written down that this is what they are and pretty much just very conservative about any changes. (Harvey)

Specifically within the jobs described by participants, including dean, director, and vice president, there was a huge scope of responsibility and volume of tasks required (Alice, Wallace, Elnore). Wallace and Harvey described the large numbers of direct reports, including classified staff and faculty, as well as the sheer number of departments that made up their areas of responsibility, at times comprised of close to 750 individuals and hundreds of course sections. In addition, Leona spoke of what was “just extra, as they expect administrators to do all these extra things.” She also spoke of the misperceptions around what administrators really do “you know and I used to think when I was faculty that well what do these administrators do?” (Leona), and the fact that “there is probably more off-hour work for administrators than there is for faculty” (Leona). Phyllis
mentioned how with “so many fires to put out today, we can’t be thinking about the future.”

Much of the complexity of the jobs as they exist now comes from an increase in responsibility over time through the growth of the individual colleges and the system as a whole (Alice, Wallace). In many cases new tasks would come into existence based on growth or new regulations, but their initial scope was not big enough to justify a new position.

and when I started it was a very small community college and so with the growing it was, the reason I got quote “stuck” with so many things is because we were so small that when a new regulation would come in for something you know a new process would come in, it was too big for one person but it was too small to even hire somebody else to do it so we just sort of divvied it up among the people who were there, (Alice)

tasks were assigned to people that were already in place, creating jobs that existed beyond the paper job description (Alice).

In cases of these diverse job duties, created as the “institution has grown in leaps and bounds” (Alice) the individual’s knowledge base grew as the responsibilities grew. However, now institutions are facing recruitment challenges as

that was the single biggest problem, was the diversity of the job made it so hard to bring one person in. Not that I was wonderful, it’s just that I was there for a long time” (Alice)

In some cases, unsuccessful recruiting leads management to split off responsibilities, build in subject matter expertise (Wallace), and realign job descriptions for workload balance

so after the first go round we actually took benefits out of the job description because we found that was too big of a part of it and needed to (Alice)
When successful candidates are identified and hired, the most difficult part of recruiting for the position can become retaining the successful candidate (Alice). In Alice’s case, her immediate successor lasted only a month, because while she had vast experience in one area of responsibility, several others were missing entirely from her resume “so there were very distinct areas of knowledge and experience that you just didn’t have with somebody just coming in. They’d have one or the other but not all” (Alice). She recommends taking “a look at the job description, really talk to the person that’s leaving that position and ask them about the job itself. Not what it says on paper, but what the job is [emphasis added].” in order to structure the position to be filled successfully.

Beyond job design and complexity issues, another factor affecting succession planning as it relates to recruiting new employees is salary. Jake referenced the fact that the plan for one of his former institutions was not as “embellished” because the institution never had a problem attracting talented individuals as their salary was significantly higher than competing institutions. He stated the plan was basically to attract with money “which we did” (Jake). However he also spoke of the fact that it depended upon the context of the situation. Salary alone cannot be a determining factor, and each organization is unique. As an example, lower salary equated to higher turnover, failed searches, and less internal talent. He spoke of a greater need for succession planning based on the lower salary and other contextual factors

a poor paying district […] they need to have a very formal succession plan, because they’re not going to get somebody […] to leave [...] to come to an expensive [area] and make what they pay there. (Jake)

**The Hiring Process.** These individual job design factors lead into the overall process of hiring new employees to fill job vacancies. For most of the participants the
formal announcement of their retirement came approximately one semester prior to their date of departure. While this four to six-month timeframe provided opportunity to fill the position prior to the retirees’ last day of work, “it can take a long time to fill a position” (Alice) through the entire hiring process.

You know they announced my position, the vacancy, and tried to recruit for it, but they didn’t hire anybody until I think maybe the third round of interviews. So you know by that time I was pretty much gone. (Harvey)

Interim appointments were used to fill positions during short-term vacancies, and often drew on established personal relationships because the interim hiring process was not as formal as the standard hiring process (Jake, Leona). In Jake’s case, “I think they looked at one other person” (Jake) for an interim appointment. And Harvey brought up the fact that within his institution “we tried to get someone who would not be applying for the job” (Harvey).

As mentioned previously, job descriptions that led the hiring process tended to be generic and both Alice and Harvey brought up the fact that no knowledge management was outlined within the formal job description “I can’t remember if there was something in there that said here you are responsible for you know managing this batch of information” (Harvey). Leona described drafting a new job description as a means of knowledge management and transfer, crafting a detailed tool for others to reference.

A specific question was asked to determine whether successors had been formally or informally identified once the participants’ retirements were announced. In one case, a successor was chosen, but that individual did not feel they were ready to assume the position being vacated “I thought she would be perfect but she wouldn’t do it because she wasn’t ready” (Phyllis). In another case a successor was “unfortunately” identified
(Leona), and Wallace stated that not everyone got equal opportunity to be chosen as a successor “I can’t say they were necessarily groomed for it” (Wallace).

In determining what to share with successors, participants were clear that all of the technical aspects of the job can be learned. But the personality part, the dealing with people, if you don’t have a knack for that that’s hard to learn. (Phyllis)

Determining what to share with successors was one issue described in the interviews, and another was how to actually share the information. Wallace, Leona, and Harvey all spoke of the need for a “formalized transition period” (Leona). Recommendations for length of time for this transition ranged from “minimum one week” (Leona) to six months for someone coming from the outside [like that], it might take more than one or two months. My assumption in this transition is they have some background in higher Ed and the community college. (Wallace)

This overlap between employees would allow for transfer of knowledge around those things that cannot be written down, including the transfer of relationships, and the opportunity to introduce new leaders to faculty “you want to introduce them in such a way that they’re going to be accepted by faculty” (Wallace). While lack of time was a challenge often described as a barrier to succession planning, in the case of overlap the dean who is leaving will have time, because now there’s two deans at least for a while to share some of the workload. And I think there could be a lot of sharing going on, even little things (Wallace)

Both Wallace and Leona recommended codifying or mandating knowledge transfer through a built-in transition period, and “would have welcomed the opportunity” (Leona). However, in Harvey’s case, with three hiring rounds necessary to find a successor, this overlap would not have been possible. Wallace felt fortunate to have had the support of executive leadership through the opportunity to train his successor for close to six months “yes, I had the opportunity to do that because [vice president] set it up that way”
(Wallace), and he took pride in the fact that the individual performed well and had since been promoted

I kind of think that things worked out well because she replaced me, did a good job and the division is still doing really well. And she’s moving on to vice president (Wallace)

**The Personal Journey and Preparation.** While many institutional factors were discussed as they relate to succession planning, personal planning and decision-making were also discussed. As employees look at the timelines of their own journeys toward retirement, they can begin to realize the similar paths of those around them. As these retired participants reflected on the importance of succession planning, they acknowledged the need for a plan based on age distribution of management. Jake referenced the statistics of age distribution per district, choosing to focus on the East Coast as opposed to California

there are some institutions if you look at some of the ones back East where a third of their people are 63 or over and I mean that is that’s just it’s it’s incredible! It’s like really? (Jake)

Harvey suggested

if there could be a a way for folks who have retired to shed some light on the colleges the community college system I think from their experience. Actually for you know things that could be improved (Harvey)

acknowledging that every administrator has “different responsibilities, different career paths that they were on” (Harvey).

While the importance of the knowledge possessed by retirees was clearly described, Jake spoke of the need to bring in “different blood” (Jake) and new ideas, acknowledging “that’s important for any organization” (Jake), not just education. Specifically he suggested “incentivizing people to get the hell out of the system” (Jake).
One incentive takes the form of Golden handshakes or bonuses for early retirement (Jake, Alice, Leona). In Alice’s case

one of the reasons I left when I left, it was the last year of our early retirement incentive, which made the difference for me in being able. I mean I had a good retirement, but I want to travel. I want to do things. (Alice)

However, Leona recognized the fact that early announcement may extend the time between announcing and departing unnecessarily.

The experiences of participants upon announcement of their formal retirement date were mixed. For Wallace, “it was pretty smooth,” which he was quite proud of, while Phyllis stated “that’s kind of hard because then there is a power struggle, people you know, or different ones want to step in” (Phyllis). In addition, attitudes changed around the urgency for knowledge transfer and preparation for a successor (Phyllis), even when being seen as a “lame duck” (Leona). Speaking further of ducks, Phyllis recommended putting “your ducks in a row” and stated her opinion “and so I think it’s incumbent on a good manager to to take care of business that way,” communicating information to others, and figuring it out for yourself if necessary.

The decision to formally announce a date to retire was described as a difficult one for some. Alice said “but I think a lot of people it’s the financial incentives. And having their benefits continued.” Leona talked about the stress of holding an administrative position as a reason to leave. Alice also reflected on some of her peers not having life outside of work, “some of the people I think just they don’t have a lot of outside activities and so they stay out of boredom” (Alice). Jake spoke of being “unbelievably lucky” and having no reason to leave saying:

...it’s a nice job. You know, you get paid pretty well, particularly at [institution], you get paid great, you work with nice people, 99% of the students you come in
contact with nice people, they appreciate what you do for them, you’re doing a good thing, it it’s really it’s a nice job. So people aren’t wanting to get out too fast, so there’s a lot of people that tend to hang around kind of a long time... (Jake)

While some participants have the challenge of choosing to leave a great job, others struggled with eliminated positions “the job I applied for didn’t exist anymore” (Elnore), and an environment where “I would’ve rather have kept my job at [institution] but it was becoming impossible,” (Phyllis). In these cases retirement from a community college was not the end of the road. For Elnore, retirement “wasn’t it for me” and Phyllis reflected “that’s kind of why I keep going back to work.”

Several participants had been asked to return to either their former institutions or others, as consultants or full-time employees (Elnore, Alice, Jake). For Alice, “mine was a little different situation when you leave and come back full-time for a year.” Jake has a formal position working one day per week, though not as an administrator “I work here one day a week... I have always kept busy and kind of in tune with [my former profession]” (Jake). He recognized the need to stay up-to-date with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that go along with the job to which you may return.

Types of information and assistance provided by returnees included specific job-related functions related to knowledge of the former position, providing “contacts within my local community” (Leona), fielding phone calls, responding to questions via email, and providing historical references. At one point Alice “probably was getting 50 to 100 emails a day”; however “gradually over the years the the phone calls and emails have diminished” (Alice), as the new and remaining employees gained confidence through experience and knowledge transfer. When consulting, strategic planning and “a lot on accreditation most recently” (Phyllis) were high on the list of assignments.
In cases where retirees returned, several were sure to make the distinction that they were no longer permanent employees and so “I don’t want to completely take the lead, because I’m not the employee, and I think that that’s an important distinction” (Elnore). Phyllis made a point to work on developing individuals’ contacts and skills.

I got them in touch with key contacts, people like at the accrediting commission. I still had relationships the people there, so rather than me call, to get the information or whatever, I contacted them so that they would have a permanent connection. With the strategic plan I could’ve gone in and just in it all myself. But I didn’t. We had a strategic planning committee, they each person had a job, and it was like teaching them how to do it so that the next time round they can do it themselves (Phyllis).

Her philosophy was reflected in her statement “and all along the way you try and teach them how to do it so they don’t have to hire you back.” (Phyllis).

One of the things provided to employees by retirees as consultants was a different perspective and a view from outside the institution (Jake). Multiple study participants mentioned the fact that remaining employees wanted confirmation that they were doing the right things, making the right decisions “it’s just then what do you think or what did you do kind of thing” (Alice), and that situations were in fact as they interpreted them (Jake, Phyllis, Alice). Alice saw this confirmation as a desire for employees not to have to reinvent the wheel, but to use others’ experience in place of trial and error “so they don’t have to you know play it through” (Alice).

Some retirees were requested to return, and though they may have been “flattered and honored that they’d called me” (Harvey), they chose not to return. Harvey had a great deal to say on the matter, having learned from experience with the implementation of Proposition 13 that returning to and institution during poor economic times can be “a real morale killer.” He went on to say “I had seen other people in my position who returned
after they retired and I didn’t think it was a good thing to do.” When asked why, his response was:

After you have been a manager and you have that position of authority and responsibility, once you retire from it, you don’t have that authority and responsibility anymore. Even if you have you know some kind of contract that says you’re going to be the you know interim dean or vice president or whatever, it’s not there. (Harvey).

In addition, upon further reflection, Harvey looked at it as

it would not be you know ethical for me to take a job where I couldn’t perform at a level I wanted to perform at. My mind would be on something else.... and it would not be fair” (Harvey).

Jake spoke of the decline in productivity with age “you’re just not as productive as you were” (Jake). While very confident in his abilities based on experience and time in the job, he knew that just prior to his retirement he was not performing at the same high level he had only a few years before.

But was I as productive as I personally was five years earlier? Probably not. You know you’re just, you’re a little older, you’re a little more tired, you’re a little whatever. (Jake)

While some retirees chose to return and others didn’t, Jake spoke of the need to give his successor space, stating

I’ve stayed away as much as I can from my successor....I try to stay out of her business, and frankly she has asked me little or nothing. Which is fine with me. (Jake)

Leona spoke of the transition into retirement, saying: “the next part is letting go and just letting it go on. So retirement is a big one and I’ve been working on.” (Leona).

While a difficult transition to make based on investment of oneself and pride in your work (Leona), Wallace and Harvey both spoke of the fact that once they retired they “really retired” (Wallace). Harvey talked about how
I’d reached the end of my career. I’d worked in the community colleges for 32 years and it was time for me to move on. Let the next generation come in (Harvey)

Wallace didn’t want to have to think about politics and Alice, after returning twice “didn’t want to come back again” (Alice).

Participants had recommendations for individuals on the other side of the hiring process as well, those entering new positions. Phyllis’s recommendation was:

So I would say find a mentor, and if you get turned down find another one. You know you’ve got to ask people. And people are generally flattered that you want to pick their brain. And are generally I think very cooperative. They’ll give you what time they can. (Phyllis)

Leona advised “find an administrator in a neighboring college, ask to interview them or shadow them. I was always pleased to do that” (Leona). But above all, have respect for the work done by one’s predecessor.

**The Context of Succession Planning**

In order to understand the processes of succession planning and knowledge transfer within the community college system you need to have an understanding of the context in which these functions take place. The institutional culture present at each individual college provides a lens through which to view these activities. As described by Jake:

...it’s kind of like family therapy. You can’t understand the individual unless you understand the context of the family that there in or the family that they came from. And that’s what longtime employees bring you, is sort of a historical history that tells you how did we get where we are. (Jake)

Wallace agrees that the most important thing to transfer to new employees is the idea of culture. Phyllis acknowledged that creating culture, while very hard work “was worthwhile.”
Culture. Within a community college, culture is made up of people and politics, and the unique blend that exists between them. The creation of culture can be done through training or “indoctrination” (Phyllis) and the president plays a big role in “creating a culture that where people did collaborate, did share and it didn’t come easy” (Phyllis), or where communication through open dialogue (Wallace) exists. A new leader can bring a new style, and “that was a real tough one for people” (Phyllis). Culture shock can occur not only with new leadership that when entering the world of community colleges from K-12 or outside of higher education (Alice, Wallace, Jake)

and so I had come out of that system where everything was black and white and you didn’t. And when I got into the college it was just it was just whoa! (Alice)

This lack of familiarity with the culture of the institutions may lead to quick turnover, where “you’d have all kinds of problems, and you’d be gone in about a year and a half” (Wallace).

Politics. The concept of politics within the college includes the job and “politically what people think about it” (Alice). The “personal political landscape” (Leona) may become a factor “at those upper levels where you know personalities get involved” (Leona) and pressure exists to make various decisions (Leona). Alice recommends learning the politics around a particular position through mentoring and others experiences. And Leona claimed that “until you become an administrator you don’t really understand the politics” (Leona). Wallace described the ramifications of relationships among faculty members and their ripple effect in the context of various decisions and actions. He speaks of the potential for resistance by faculty not overtly, but covertly.
I gave the story of slaves before the Civil War, [...] you had the field slaves and you had the house slaves. The house slaves worked in the house with the master. Well sometimes [...] the house slaves if they were being badly treated by the master there were stories of how the house slave would put ground-up glass or something in the master’s food and the master would die and they never knew what happened. I said well remember this you don’t want faculty to put ground-up glass in your food. And you’re gonna find yourself stranded, isolated and you’re not gonna be able to do what you need to do (Wallace).

Leona recommended codifying knowledge transfer processes in order to “circumnavigate the political favoritism” that may exist in an institution.

**People.** When participants spoke of people and personnel issues, they mentioned the unique aspects of personal relationships (Jake, Alice) and the importance of getting to know the players as you learn the technical pieces of a job (Alice, Wallace). While it is important to know the players, you must also realize that “you don’t change human relations” (Wallace). Alice spoke of the fact that the more people who are involved as individual stakeholders in a given situation or a supervisory role, the more difficult the job becomes.

Jake spoke of the fact that without due diligence, transferred relationships may wind up giving individuals a “halo effect or you can, you can just make somebody out to be a horrible human being when they’re really not.” (Jake). While standard personnel issues are generally documented in an individual’s employee file, some things are “the kind of stuff you can’t write down” (Wallace). This may include individuals’ potential for putting up roadblocks, which may make it impossible to implement ideas and change (Alice). Wallace reiterates that without being accepted by employees your life is “going to be hard” (Wallace), and that it is important to build relationships to avoid being undermined. Alice describes the emotional difficulties that may arise making it difficult to stay in job. She also explains that individuals should “make sure you understand the
job before you make any changes.” (Alice). “If you have a good style that gets people to cooperate and do what you need to do then I think you’re almost you’re partly you’re almost all the way there” (Wallace). Harvey describes a process whereby he would find those people with you know a lot of energy and creativity, [who] would make good mid middle managers and move on. So I encouraged them and there were some of them who would come to me and ask about moving up. (Harvey)

Alice also described the importance of knowing the reaction you will get from various people, while Wallace talked about the impact of full-time faculty on the political landscape. “And these people have tenure they’re not going anywhere you know?” (Wallace), and reverberations down the line can make it hard to amend mistakes if you do it wrong the first time (Wallace). He also talked about different expectations within higher education from a supervisory standpoint because “you know we are dealing with educated people” (Wallace).

While individuals impact the political landscape in their own way, generational factors may also come into play, with its importance evidenced by the fact that an entire management team read who “all read a book on that” on generational differences (Jake). Elnore spoke of working with different generations as “I think you have to approach them differently based on their personal life experience” (Elnore). In trying to work with the attitudes brought into the workforce by older workers, Phyllis experienced a number of challenges including the fact that older deans didn’t want to do anything a new way, they didn’t want technology, so they didn’t want, they didn’t want to change to have you know the instruction be student centered and you know they were very old school (Phyllis)

Her suggested solution was “what you do is you work the best you can with them but ultimately they have to retire. (Phyllis)
The Means of Succession Planning

Within the context of succession planning, a variety of processes and types of knowledge management were discussed by the participants. This included knowledge transfer, training and development, and mentoring as means of implementing succession planning.

Knowledge Management and Transfer. First was a description of the process of knowledge management as they understood it to be, including keeping files and records related to all major job functions, in good order, to be passed on to their successors (Elnore, Leona, Harvey). Some distributed paper reports on a weekly basis, as well as keeping binders related to procedures (Harvey). While knowledge management was not prioritized within the job (Elnore), most participants had some form of documentation, though not a lot (Wallace). Part of the discussion around knowledge management was the fact that information can become quickly outdated, especially hardcopy documents you know this issue of the manual. I don’t know if that’s such a good idea because things change. And you put together a manual and let’s say it doesn’t really it’s not as relevant anymore (Wallace)

Leona gave credit to her organization for storage of knowledge which was built into the accreditation process. However she also explained that in regards to storage, “I don’t even think the knowledge management was built into the accreditation” (Leona) and it didn’t mean knowledge was actually transferred or utilized (Leona).

When the time came to transfer knowledge, the most important piece mentioned was again culture. Wallace asked the question “is it just transferring knowledge or, after our discussion here today, is transferring relationships, or?” (Wallace) He acknowledged the need to establish good relationships or “you’re dead in the water” (Wallace). He
chose to transfer knowledge orally instead of through written documentation “but no, I didn’t document a whole lot. A lot of it was just oral” (Wallace). He also had a unique description of training the successor whereby he allowed for demonstration of the skills he was sharing “here’s how to do this. Okay let me see you do it now” (Wallace). Alice made a point of speaking with those who would remain behind after retirement in providing historical references to the information that was transferred. Leona “set up several opportunities for her to meet my contacts in the community” (Leona) and explained that much of the knowledge transfer that occurred happened informally at dean’s meetings. She also explained that “a good strong director of human resources is important to the process” (Leona).

Leadership. When describing successful leaders, the participants referenced not only the context and situations, but the fact that an organization’s structure must be supportive of successful leaders and have support from the top levels (Wallace). Alice cautioned future leaders to “make sure you understand the job before you make any changes,” by showing employees that you understand their perspective in providing reassurance that you have looked at the impacts of potential change from all angles. She explained that by illustrating the thought and care exercised before implementing changes, leaders can gain confidence from employees through respect. She provided an example of when prop 13 was coming in and we all knew we weren’t getting COLAs and we were gonna have to have cutbacks, the first thing that administration did was call a campuswide meeting. And they take us into the room and the president stands up and says okay all the administrators are taking a 5% cut in pay. Now that still leaves us with a deficit of blah blah blah. Our primary goal is we don’t want to lay anybody off that we don’t have to. So we want to hear from you. What ideas do you have on how we can get rid of, of how we can manage this deficit and not layoff anybody or layoff as few as possible? The response was incredible. [...]


And I think a big reason that happened was because administration said you tell us what’s can work for you. (Alice).

The personality of the leader also came up through the course of the interviews.

Wallace talked about how if an individual’s style allows for cooperation, they are “almost all the way there” and will be successful. Alice warned that lacking interaction skills, and rubbing people the wrong way, may make the “start a lot more difficult” for the transition into a new position. Harvey spoke of seeking future middle managers from faculty who had a lot of initiative and they were pretty smart and they’d figure out what to do and how to do it and I’d find those people with you know a lot of energy and creativity would make good mid managers and move on. So I encouraged them. (Harvey)

While Leona spoke of a need for leaders to be fair even if their decisions lead people to dislike them personally.

One misstep that was described by both Elnore and Wallace had to do with assuming capability on the part of employees until proven otherwise. Wallace provided an example of assuming and taking for granted that an employee had various skill sets based on their prior position title, later finding out they did not possess the entire set of skills necessary to fill the highly complex position they now held

she came out of the instruction office so I naturally assumed that she knew all of this stuff, you know. But she knew the instruction office stuff but she didn’t know how that really worked at the division level and so that’s what I took for granted. (Wallace)

This taught Wallace in the future “I said no, this is going to be more closely watched, I’m going to be on top of this closer and that worked out better” (Wallace). He didn’t want to make the mistake again, and so integrated experiential learning into training his successors and utilized the chain of command as needed. This type of experience also occurred for Elnore when “I think I probably have come into jobs myself over my career
where, you know, it’s a mess and you have to re-create things” (Elnore), so she took this into consideration for future action.

**Training and Development.** Several of the participants had opportunities to participate in leadership programs they found to be beneficial. Leona spoke of a “weeklong Institute of leadership training” at a private university. Harvey mentioned another weeklong seminar in Santa Barbara, designed for community college leaders, in addition to a “seminar for new leaders” (Harvey) at Lake Arrowhead in Southern California. Elnore had the opportunity to participate in various academies covering both leadership and supervisory skills, which were often unique to the individual institution. Leona welcomed the opportunity to build management skills through “yearly retreats, which we’d work on you know bonding and doing leadership skills” (Leona). Harvey expressed a belief that those

who went on to graduate school to find out about education, you know how to become a better manager and, probably become a better manager because of that. Instead of trial and error like I’ve been through. (Harvey)

In addition to specific leadership training, various forms of institutional training for current employees were described by participants. Training and orientation for classified staff tended to be fairly structured, though brief. Jake described specific departmental training, and Leona talked about “for classified it was maybe working with the person from a day to a week” (Leona). All new employees received a very detailed benefits overview that was “organization specific as opposed to position specific” (Alice). This had changed over time due to structure and time constraints, and previously “when I was there it was more quote “personal” than it was position” (Alice).
In opposition to the brief classified training was the full-time faculty orientation and training process. Three participants spoke of a one-year program, highly structured and developed with input from faculty and administration (Jake, Ellis, Leona). At one institution participation “not optional” (Leona) and covered everything from general benefit and position overview to people, places, and classroom management (Leona). These new faculty academies were supported through human resources and staff development offices (Jake, Wallace, Alice).

In addition to employee orientations and full-time faculty training, participants mentioned the transitions made when stepping from faculty roles to administrative. Elnore talked about how

- typically the leadership of the community college or any educational institution came from the classroom. And they may be a great classroom teacher and they could be a good administrator but they don’t get any training on how to be an administrator (Elnore).

She recommended supervisor training to cover rules and regulations and how to manage budgets, following up with “so is it any wonder then that these things aren’t well run? No surprise to me.” (Elnore). Harvey provided recommendations for moving from the classroom into management including a number of “intermediate stages:”

Yes, I think someone who’s going to be moving out of the classroom into management, there needs to be some intermediate stages that they go through so that they take on a responsibility for, you know a college wide project or something that leads a portion of their division or the department, where they have the responsibilities outside of the classroom. Where they can meet and work with lots of different people just not the math or English or whatever part of the college they’re from. The next thing they need to start doing is understanding the relationship the larger relationship between the district and the college if they come from multicampus, and the state Chancellor’s office. And how all that works. You know, the Ed code, the budget, cycles for all those. Because I’ve met a lot of experienced managers who have no idea how the machinery for the community colleges works. They need to understand the engine for making all that money. And a lot of them didn’t, they had no idea. Yeah they they needed to
take the initiative to learn it to find out what goes on, you know go to the board of
governors meetings for the Chancellor’s. Go to the district board meetings, just to
see what it is, you know read over the policies for your college and your district.
And then I guess then also the contracts for the faculty and for the other unions
that you have. (Harvey)

Jake asked the question “why become an administrator?” followed with the reason that
administrators receive the same pay for longer work year and more hours of work. And
Leona spoke of the pressures of being an administrator and mentioned the fact that if she
had stayed as faculty instead of transitioning into administration, she probably would
have retired at a later date.

While classified staff and faculty had formal, structured training and orientation in
place, there was virtually nothing in place for administrators, as Leona stated: “zippo.” In
addition, “money starts to become a problem” (Wallace) in some settings.

**Mentoring.** Formal training and orientation programs existed for classified staff
and full-time faculty, but the biggest development component described by participants
related to mentoring. Phyllis spoke of the fact that providing mentoring and development
opportunities for administrators “wasn’t the norm,” although two participants described a
mentoring process whereby a new manager was assigned a mentor upon their arrival
(Elnore, Harvey).

In Elnore’s case, a mentor had been assigned when she started her administrative
jobs in two different community colleges. At one institution, though the process was
somewhat formalized through the management Senate, the mentoring “consisted of one
lunch and that was that” it “wasn’t as structured as it should’ve been” (Elnore). At the
second institution, the process was very different, and Elnore considered it of great
benefit
and I think that that was good because you know, coming from the outside especially that that was the first job I had in California, you know it was the first job I had at community college and so that was really helpful to me. (Elnore)

At Harvey’s college,

you would have a you know sort of a mentor if you were a new manager. And that would be the person you would go to ask a question.... It was informal. And it would just be having lunch or coffee with someone, or going to that person to ask questions about procedures, processes.” (Harvey)

Phyllis spoke of a similar structure where

the new deans that got together, I can’t remember how often we did it, maybe once a month. Where they could be stupid, ask questions that they would be embarrassed ask in front of the whole group like you know I should know this. And so you know it was just a very informal, over lunch you know, ask questions kind of thing. (Phyllis)

In Leona’s college mentoring was primarily for faculty and helped guide them through the tenure process. There was not a lot available for administrators. Jake had the same experience with a lack of mentoring describing “not so much for the administrators.” In cases where mentoring did exist, e-mentoring was sometimes utilized to overcome geographical challenges (Elnore).

One of the common themes that emerged within mentoring as described by participants was the ACCCA mentoring program. This very formal program “provided a lot of guidance and mentoring for the administrators in California” (Harvey). It allowed individuals to connect with a mentor outside of their own institution (Leona). Several study participants served as mentors within the ACCCA program (Phyllis, Harvey), while others benefited from workshops provided for “up and comers” (Phyllis). One of the drawbacks of the formal mentor programs was a lack of time available on the part of executive leaders to mentor others (Alice).
Benefits of mentoring were described by nearly every participant. Alice lamented a change in the mentoring structure at her college which ended with those who had mentors faring better than those without. She saw the decline in mentoring over time and said:

I think that it’s sad in terms of the people coming in because I don’t think they get to be grounded before they have to really have major issues that they have to address. And they don’t get a chance to get grounded first and understand the system. (Alice)

In her case she saw higher turnover based on the lack of interaction as well as reduced understanding of the politics and personalities of the job. Phyllis mentioned mentoring as a means of knowledge transfer, which she utilized after realizing that others might want to “step into my shoes” (Phyllis). And Wallace used it frequently when working with direct reports as well. When taking on new responsibilities within his division,

I think I had as much as nine months or year to work with them in one instance so that part was really good and I was able to like I said work with them closely together, separately. We’d have a lot we’d meet several times a week I should say for hours (Wallace) as an intensive type of training and sharing information. Harvey spoke of a former supervisor who incorporated mentoring into her own work:

She was very proactive in seeking out people that she could promote within her institution. As well as other people throughout the state and working with them to see that they would get the type of job they were looking for. She is a great mentor for a lot of people in the state. (Harvey)

Participants played various roles in mentoring process. Jake served as a committee member for the establishment of mentoring programs, while Leona served as a mentor for members of the community at large in addition to having interns. While participants served as mentors during the course of their careers, there was little in the way of formal structure mentioned following retirement, other than through the
consultant process mentioned previously. For Phyllis and Jake mentoring became fielding phone calls from others, and Harvey has not participated in any at all.

Results and Interpretations

This section of the chapter relates the results of the study, by way of in-depth analysis and interpretation through the lens of the three literature streams outlined in the Chapter 2 Literature Review. Four results are described in detail with reference to the accompanying research findings. These results form the basis of the final recommendations provided in the subsequent final chapter.

Result 1: California Community Colleges need to increase their knowledge of succession planning to move beyond talk to action.

While succession planning has been on the minds of corporate America since at least 1968 when Ostrowski spoke of the critical need for succession planning, public agencies still lag behind their corporate counterparts (Reeves, 2010; Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). This is evidenced clearly in the responses of the participants, and their reference to the lack of plans for both succession and emergency vacancy replacement. Immense growth in the community college sector beginning in the 1960s led to not only the hiring of large numbers of baby boomers (Campbell, Syed & Morris, 2010), but eventually the complexity and stressful nature of today’s administrative jobs. The sheer volume of work and scope of responsibility for these administrative positions make it difficult to fill vacancies due to the retirement of the same boomers who were hired decades ago.

Misperceptions abound regarding the appropriateness of succession planning within public institutions. While organizations struggle with how to implement these plans within the letter of the law, the next generation of leaders is being left unprepared
(Reeves, 2010). One thing worth mentioning is the dichotomy between the public perception and the private “behind closed doors” reality described by those trying to implement what they can. In addition, community colleges are missing out on the “significant benefits, including improved financial performance” (Barnett & Davis, 2008) that could be realized through the large return on investment noted in studies of integrating leadership development best practices and succession planning (Groves, 2007).

The study participants spoke of the need to move beyond talk toward implementation, realizing, especially in retrospect, the vital need to address the coming wave of retirements and position vacancies. Some even ended up going so far as to take on the role of succession planner themselves as a personal core value or guiding philosophy. As described in the literature, a demonstrated commitment to identifying future leaders is critical for college presidents and community colleges in particular (Strom, Sanchez & Downey-Schilling, 2011; Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010), and while the participants had not achieved the presidency, they took on this role by assisting with leadership development where they could.

As with any type of college wide program, visible and ongoing support from the president down through the executive ranks is critical to carrying out a succession plan (Groves, 2007; Kesler, 2002). Unfortunately, the traditional models that exist around the hiring process, along with the conservative outlook of many college leaders, do not allow for proactive redesign and realignment of jobs within the context of succession planning. Several participants spoke of the need to provide training to presidents and other
executives, which over time could lead to organizational learning and a change in how succession planning is implemented.

Riggs (2009) speaks of the need for community colleges to “undergo significant change in order to stay viable in the future.” The hiring and replacement processes that currently exist within the institutions represented by study participants are time-consuming and do not necessarily take into consideration the input of the person retiring from the position. Formalized transition periods, potentially as components of Grow-Your-Own-Leaders (GYOL) programs could assist institutions in providing customized leadership development that addresses the unique culture, values, and mission of an individual college.

Many of the participants would have welcomed the opportunity to formally transition successors into their new roles, even calling for codifying the process for knowledge transfer. However as with any type of internal training or leadership development program, GYOL programs have the potential drawback of losing out on diverse ideas, perpetuating bad habits, and maintaining a culture of dysfunction (Riggs, 2009; Reile & Kezar, 2010). Participants acknowledged the hard work that goes into changing or maintaining culture and recognized the value in expending resources toward this end.

Result 2: Personal career development and retirement journeys have the potential to affect organizational succession planning.

While organizations may have ultimate control over the succession planning process, individual career paths and the retirement journey from formal notification through “finally” retiring can impact any plan that may exist. Community colleges have
also faced several years of budget cuts that have driven individuals to take increasingly more personal responsibility for the time and cost associated with professional development (Reeves, 2010; Ebbers, Conover & Samuels, 2010). However, institutions must realize that it is in their best interest to make these training opportunities available to employees (Strom et al., 2011; McNair, 2010; Riggs, 2009; Ebbers et al., 2010). Without the loyalty inherent in programs offered internally by an institution, future leaders may seek not only development outside the college’s walls, but promotional opportunities as well, leaving the college at a disadvantage.

In addition to the individual impact is the statistical age distribution within the workforce. Older employees are currently working longer than was initially anticipated (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), and while retirement incentives including Golden handshakes may entice them to go, other economic and personal factors may make their jobs too attractive to leave. Keeping busy at a great job with health benefits alleviates boredom and keeps them at work. Ultimately, this delay in retirement will help alleviate potential shortages in both the size of the workforce and in funds to support pension obligations that will exist as baby boomers retire (Scinovacz, 2011; Johnson, 2011; Wolf & Amirkhanyan, 2010; Quinn, 2010; Myers, 2008/2009; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; McManus et al., 2007).

While some retirees are given the opportunity to return to their former institutions as consultants, not every older worker desires to return, especially full-time. It will be incumbent on community colleges to create structures that support employees and offer flexibility through options like phased retirement (Johnson, 2011; Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Galinsky, 2007). Knowledge capital will need to be considered as these options are
developed (Helm-Stevens, 2010; Calo, 2008; Barnett & Davis, 2008; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). In addition, the culture of the institution will determine how potential retirees view their departure and the knowledge transfer process.

**Result 3: Institutional culture, personnel, and politics tend to impact succession planning efforts.**

Individuals and the knowledge they possess are inherently linked (Nonaka, 1994). One of the flaws of knowledge management is the difficulty in separating the knowledge from the individual who possesses it (Acsente, 2010). However, while researchers agree that knowledge transfer is difficult, they also understand that with conscientious work and full support from the top levels of the organization, implementation of a knowledge management strategy is possible (McNichols, 2010). As participants stated, the president plays a big role in establishing a culture in support of training and employee development, and a new leader with a new style can alter the culture to the point that it may derail any work that has been done in regards to succession.

Within community colleges, nearly 80% of financial resources go to support people. In cases where budget reductions have eliminated organizationally supported development programs, individuals have taken it upon themselves to document knowledge related to their positions and the organization as a whole. This is based on self-motivation and individual autonomy (Nonaka, 1994). Participants mentioned the importance of transferring relationships during transitional periods. Literature shows a lack of trust or established relationships can be a hindrance to knowledge management, and providing the opportunity to establish both makes the process easier (McNichols, 2010; Holton & Yamkovenko, 2008).
One drawback to relying on a socially driven knowledge transfer process is the belief held by many individuals that knowledge is power (Jackson, 2010; Kasten, 2009; Li et al., 2009). Relationships that are unique to two individuals can change significantly when other people get involved. You can’t change human relations, and people can put up roadblocks based on personalities, past action, or the political landscape. This resistance can make a manager’s life especially difficult, by not allowing for work to get done.

Within the context of higher education, tenure plays a role, with full-time faculty remaining in their jobs indefinitely, regardless of their willingness to support administration. It can also factor in to generationally-based challenges, where attitudes and approach can differ significantly. Participants spoke of the fact that it is difficult to fully understand organizational politics until you get to the upper levels of administration where personalities can emerge as a bigger challenge to doing a job.

One way of alleviating the difficulties that people and politics bring to the mix is to be conscious of organizational history, trying to gain full understanding of the ramifications of decisions, and conveying understanding of the context before making changes. Missteps early on in a relationship can lead to reverberations down the line and difficulty in amending mistakes that are made out of a lack of awareness. The opportunity for an overlap or transitional period with retirees as they leave the organization may provide additional insight into existing personalities. There is also mentoring, which is a proven best practice for establishing knowledge sharing relationships between individuals (Karkoulian, Halawi & McCarthy, 2008)
Result 4: Knowledge transfer is likely to be informal and individually, not organizationally, driven.

While mentoring has been established as a successful means of sharing information (McNichols, 2010; Wiessner & Sullivan, 2007; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006), this is not the only practice informally at play within community colleges. One of the simplest means of transferring knowledge as mentioned by participants was keeping files, binders, and other records in good order to hand off to successors. However, this is not formally documented within most job descriptions. In addition, written documentation can quickly become outdated as people and the economy change and alter the relevance of hardcopy information. Ideas and requirements in support of a shifting mission or objectives can also require employees to change their processes and methods. This can be impacted by the different attitudes brought to the workplace by various generations.

Training and orientations that are established within institutions tend to be focused on classified staff and faculty with little in the way of administrative opportunity. They also are usually driven through the human resources department and cover things like employee benefits and organizational structure, and not job functions beyond the job description. Over time these types of orientations have shifted from covering in-depth cultural components to become more position driven.

Individual leadership styles and skills from the president down through the employee ranks also have a bearing on the success or failure of programs within an institution. A personable leader with a style that allows for cooperation will be able to garner and share information better than an individual who lacks interaction skills or tends to rub people the wrong way.
Participants expressed their opinion that leadership programs can be beneficial. These types of training opportunities may include weeklong institutes and various internally sponsored academies. While these programs may be sponsored by an organization, participation, including financial responsibility, is incumbent upon the individual when colleges are faced with budgets that restrict training expenditures.

Beyond short-term courses are entire academic degrees based on educational leadership. A couple of participants spoke of the benefits of having studied this type of curriculum beyond traditional subject matter expertise in a specific teaching field, prior to transitioning into administration. Additional recommendations for the transition from the classroom to administrative roles are individual preparation through supervisory experience and training, and taking the initiative to assume roles outside of the classroom or department. One participant recommended personal study of the machinery that makes up the community college system as a whole, and each of the individual parts of a specific college.

One of the most mentioned areas of opportunity for development is the use of mentoring, which is also documented in the literature (McNichols, 2010; Wiessner & Sullivan, 2007; Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). Again, while most participants would have welcomed a more formalized mentoring structure within their institutions, in the absence of formality, the importance of mentoring drove its prioritization within the individual’s workload. The Association of California Community College Administrators or ACCCA has a highly structured mentor program that was recommended almost universally.

As stated in the literature, there are a variety of knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be enhanced through mentoring. The use of e-mentoring may assist when
budgetary or geographic challenges exist (Bamford, 2011). In addition, the benefits of cross-generation mentoring, including the utilization of individuals aged 55 or older, may enhance the abilities of employees across the board, as well as their dedication to the job (Aiman-Smith et al., 2006). One participant spoke of the insight retirees could provide in addressing issues that may exist within organizations, and several spoke of the fact that they would welcome the opportunity to do so. Unfortunately, most organizations do not have formal structures in place to support this type of work, however beneficial it may be. Once individuals announced their retirement, the power they once had diminished, including their ability to influence decisions. This would have to be overcome in some way in order to utilize the vast amount of knowledge that exists within the minds of these retirees.

**Summary**

This chapter detailed the findings of the study, illustrated through participants’ own words and later interpreted into results through integration of relevant literature. Findings included three major themes that emerged, each within the California Community College setting 1) Succession Planning as a Process, 2) The Context of Succession Planning, and 3) The Means of Succession Planning. Each of these major themes and the subthemes supporting the overarching phenomena were described in detail. Results included 1) California Community Colleges need to increase their knowledge of succession planning to move beyond talk to action, 2) Personal career development and retirement journeys have the potential to affect organizational succession planning, 3) Institutional culture, personnel, and politics tend to impact
succession planning efforts, and 4) Knowledge transfer is likely to be informal and individually, not organizationally, driven.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to understand the lived experiences of seven individuals as they transitioned into retirement from their roles as senior leaders in the California Community College (CCC) system. The research focuses on the topics of succession planning and knowledge management and transfer, with an accompanying stream of changing workplace demographics. These topics are important in the context of the CCC due to the immense growth in personnel and positions that was seen several decades ago and the related vast numbers of retirement-aged employees at present time.

The phenomenological research approach utilized semi-structured interviews, including accompanying field notes, the transcripts of which were then analyzed to determine common themes and phenomena. The interview protocol that was utilized focused on familiarity and use of succession planning and knowledge management and transfer by individuals and institutions, both before and after the participants formally announced their retirement. The findings also centered on succession planning and knowledge manage and transfer, and included 1) Succession Planning as a Process, 2) The Context of Succession Planning, and 3) The Means of Succession Planning.

Results from those findings were 1) California Community Colleges need to increase their knowledge of succession planning to move beyond talk to action, 2) Personal career development and retirement journeys have the potential to affect organizational succession planning, 3) Institutional culture, personnel, and politics tend to impact succession planning efforts, and 4) Knowledge transfer is likely to be informal and individually, not organizationally, driven.
Conclusions and recommendations for practical action, dissemination of information, and future research follow as the closing section of the research process.

**Conclusions**

Understanding individual lived experiences around the retirement process was the primary goal of this research study. While the questions posed were broad in nature, the interview protocol and accompanying literature review provided a framework focused on succession planning, knowledge management and transfer, and shifting workplace demographics. Without fully realizing it, the researcher compiled findings and results that fit well within this framework, with participants bringing up many different individual sub-points from the literature review without prompting from the interview questions.

Although an assumption was made that there would be a change in experiences between the formal announcement of retirement and the last date of work, the changes that were described as having emerged seem negligible. Therefore, the main research question, number 1, had the broadest set of stories and shared experiences provided by participants. The following two questions, which focused on the “before” and “after” aspects of the retirement announcement, became less important to describing the participants’ experiences, and were in fact subsets of the larger lived experience. The questions posed in this research study were:

**Research Question 1: What were the experiences of individuals from the California Community College system, as they transitioned from senior leadership roles into retirement?**

California Community Colleges need to increase their knowledge of succession planning to move beyond talk to action. In the context of succession
planning, knowledge management and transfer, and the shifting demographics of the workforce, the experiences of individuals as they transitioned into retirement were somewhat limited. In fact, in several instances, participants were unclear on what the topics actually encompassed within the educational environment. There were no formal programs in place that addressed these topics and in cases where informal discussion happened, action was usually not part of the equation.

Those participants who spoke of succession related efforts did so from the standpoint of having them as a personal core value or guiding philosophy and not as an organizational priority. There was also a mix of perception around succession planning in a public employment setting, with a lack of understanding about how to implement related plans without potentially going against employment law.

In cases where it was necessary to seek a replacement for an individual, lack of formal succession and emergency replacement plans led institutions and individuals to organizational charts and former constituents as short-sighted solutions. In one case, fairly high salary scales as compared to surrounding institutions gave false comfort and lack of urgency in preparing for succession, with the district relying instead on salary to draw a talented applicant pool. In other instances, multiple rounds of hiring were unsuccessful and ended with high turnover and instability in some divisions.

When individuals reflected on their willingness to provide input on how to restructure jobs and related job descriptions for improved recruitment and retention, they spoke of executive leaders who were conservative to the point of stagnation. A lack of support from executive levels also led to a lack of buy-in to succession planning and knowledge management processes that may have emerged from individuals.
While many participants spoke of their willingness to participate in formal transition periods to train successors, limited college budgets and formally structured hiring processes with no support for flexibility have made this nearly impossible. Budget cuts have also reduced the number of leadership training programs that are available to employees. And in those that did exist, there was very little designated for administrators’ development, with primary resources focusing on full-time faculty.

**Personal career development and retirement journeys have the potential to affect organizational succession planning.** With individuals increasingly responsible for their own development, personal journeys have a greater impact on organizational planning that may exist. Those who see themselves in senior leadership roles in the future are seeking development outside of formal institution-sponsored training programs that existed before budget cuts eliminated them. They are seeking mentors and pursuing degrees and certificates to assist them in reaching their goals, and while colleges used to support these programs financially, and would often reap the benefits when internal employees were identified for promotion, their lack of support means a lack of return on (now often nonexistent) investment.

As older adults consider retirement, there are a number of factors that are affecting their decisions. The first is economic and involves a perception of comfort in their retirement years around the financial resources they might have available. This may be altered by institutions offering retirement incentives or extended health benefits. The other factor has to do with a lack of interest in leaving jobs they see as enjoyable, coupled with a lack of outside activities and the potential for boredom upon retirement. While the decision to stay may ease the challenge of succession planning some institutions are
currently facing, at some point these individuals will still retire. With that in mind, institutions should use the longer lead time created to draft succession plans that will address the issues of succession and knowledge management and transfer. These plans could include phased retirement options that will support the older employees and their successors by meeting the needs of both groups.

**Research Question 2: What were the retirees’ experiences with knowledge transfer and succession planning “before” formally announcing their retirement?**

**Institutional culture, personnel, and politics tend to impact succession planning efforts.** These are areas that have significant impact on not only how institutions handle succession-related challenges, but also in how individuals transition in or out of leadership positions. In community colleges, generally 80% of budgetary resources are absorbed in support of people, and knowledge is also inherently linked to the individuals who possess it. With so much of an organization’s capital tied up in human resources, it is incumbent on leaders to learn how to successfully work within the confines created by different personalities and the accompanying political landscape.

When leaders face challenges related to culture, people, and politics, they may not remain in their positions as long as they would like. This may be due to their own desire to leave, or from pressure to move on that comes from employees who are more entrenched in the organization, including full-time faculty with tenure. In some cases other employees may put up roadblocks that keep an organization from moving forward. This can include keeping knowledge to oneself, using the perception that knowledge is power as a means of diminishing others’ authority and influence. Even if a college has institutional goals related to succession planning, without a supportive culture that allows
leaders to address personnel issues devoid of undue political influence, implementation will not be successful. Leaders may choose to keep ideas and information to themselves as they transition through their careers into retirement, instead of risking their reputations on programs that are doomed to fail.

**Research Question 3: What were the retirees’ experiences with knowledge transfer and succession planning “after” formally announcing their retirement?**

Knowledge transfer is likely to be informal and individually, not organizationally, driven. In cases where individuals sought knowledge transfer opportunities and worked to develop future leaders, it was internally driven. After announcing their retirements, participants took it upon themselves to transfer knowledge and communicate with fellow employees and successors where possible. This was often a continuation of mentoring that had begun prior to announcing, however the frequency and urgency changed for the retiree, though not for the organization at large.

Retired leaders may have decades worth of experientially-gained knowledge to share with others. Once they began to reflect on how they might have shared that information with others, they became quite animated and the passion they had for their former roles in the CCC system became evident. Leveraging these existing resources could lead not only to stemming the loss of institutional knowledge, but in actually reversing the trend to the benefit of individual colleges and the system as a whole.

It seemed that in retrospect, participants realized the amount of knowledge they had transferred wasn’t what it could have been, and were interested in how they could be of benefit again in the future. While this may not include returning to their institutions in a consulting capacity, there are other ways to share knowledge that lead to engagement
on the part of the retirees as well as those current employees who stand to benefit from the information.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, results, and conclusions from this study, the researcher makes the following recommendations for future practice, both within the CCCs as a system of unique institutions, and for individuals who seek senior leadership roles within those colleges. Each of the recommendations require action on the part of the organizations and individuals seeking to implement succession planning, and knowledge management and transfer, which goes beyond the planning process for the same.

Also included are recommendations for future research, which have emerged as a manner to expand on the findings, results, and conclusions of this study. Since the study was specific in regards to positions held by participants, but not to a site or sites, future research could expand understanding and application of the same topic to other employee levels or individual colleges or districts.

**Recommendations for California Community Colleges**

Current leaders of the CCCs should consider the depth and breadth of their current succession planning and knowledge management and transfer systems. Where necessary, they should seek increased knowledge of the processes and their associated systems as follows:

1. Allow for a formal transition period within the hiring process for senior administrators. Work with individuals who have articulated an upcoming (though still informal) timeline for retirement in order to begin the hiring
process and subsequent transition period as early as possible. This could allow for increased knowledge transfer and a reduction in loss of intellectual capital.

2. Codify the process of knowledge transfer. Include knowledge transfer as a component in job descriptions, accreditation processes, and the description of any formalized transition period. Work to ensure knowledge is actually being transferred and not just recorded and left unutilized.

3. Provide training to executive leaders on the topics of succession planning and knowledge management and transfer, including the application of such within a public employment setting. Give executive leaders opportunity to convey the importance of succession planning to all employees, in order to prioritize it throughout all levels of an institution.

4. Provide individuals with tools necessary to implement succession planning and knowledge management and transfer. This might include formal training programs on how to accomplish each, specialized software or hardware for recording processes and organizational history, and flexibility to work with teams and successors to share information. Try to integrate tools with job-related processes that have proven use and worth to avoid making succession planning and knowledge management and transfer a burden to employees.

5. Establish formal mentoring programs and/or allow participation in established programs for all administrators. Do not restrict mentoring to or within any employee group. If resources do not allow for formal mentoring, encourage and allow informal mentoring, including less expensive e-mentoring resources and time for mentors to meet with their mentees.
6. Conduct multi-staged exit interviews with employees who are retiring (or leaving for promotional opportunities) in order to gain insight into the work they do beyond their job descriptions and recommendations they may have for restructuring or realigning job duties. Analyze job descriptions (both written and unwritten functions) with each vacancy to strive for balanced assignments and workloads. This may assist in improving recruitment and retention.

**Recommendations for Individual Preparation**

Based on the recommendations that emerged from the interview responses, individual preparation is becoming a necessity. Those who seek senior leadership positions within the CCCs in the future should consider doing the following to prepare themselves for senior leadership roles.

1. **Find a mentor.** Use formal programs that exist or just ask someone to be one’s mentor. Keep asking until someone agrees to do so. Do not rely on mentoring programs being part of a job-related program.

2. **Participate in leadership development programs** (academies, workshops) when possible, at one’s own expense as necessary. Participate in professional associations and community-based organizations in order to benefit from any programs they may offer.

3. **Consider studying for a degree or certificate in educational leadership and the accompanying topics of supervision, management, and budgeting.**

4. **Increase knowledge of succession planning and associated knowledge management and transfer strategies for personal application.** This may start
with an understanding of what each of these is and their practice in settings both inside and outside higher education.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this research study are limited by the fact that only individual retirees were interviewed. This leaves many possibilities for future research to expand the base of knowledge beyond individual understanding and reflection on past experiences to include current practice and application for both individuals and institutions. Following are several recommendations for increasing understanding of succession planning and knowledge management and transfer processes within the CCCs.

1. Interview current senior administrators to determine if their organizations have succession plans in place. If plans exist, ask whether the plans are individually or organizationally driven. If no plans exist, find out if currently employed administrators are implementing their own plans, as the retirees indicated they had prior to retirement.

2. Interview current senior administrators to determine whether they are practicing knowledge management and transfer. Include in the interview protocol various methodologies for both long-range and short-term knowledge management and transfer, including recording organizational history, drafting procedural manuals, mentoring, and leadership training programs.

3. Interview mid-level administrators and faculty to determine if and how they are preparing to assume higher level roles. Find out if they currently feel prepared to assume higher level roles or how they are planning for future development. Determine whether they are participating in mentoring
relationships, and the types of relationships and programs that exist, whether formal or informal.

4. Research current practices at CCCs through document analysis and interviews with leaders including presidents and boards of trustees. Focus on succession planning, budgetary factors for training and development, knowledge management and transfer, emergency succession planning, and documentation of practices. Determine the priority of each of these foci for executive leadership, boards of trustees, individual employees at all levels of the organization, and employee unions.

5. Conduct a survey of as many CCCs as possible to determine if succession planning and knowledge management and transfer have been implemented and any best practices have emerged. Include mentoring and leadership training programs in addition to any others that may arise in the research process. Follow up with in-depth qualitative research to compile best practices for sharing across CCC system.

6. Analyze long-time corporate strategies to determine how CCCs might seamlessly integrate succession planning, knowledge management, and knowledge transfer into job functions to keep them from being “burdensome.” Determine similarities between corporations and CCCs that could be leveraged in making recommendations to CCCs for future practice.

Summary

This study revealed that community colleges are doing a poor job of addressing succession planning, knowledge management and transfer, and the impact of the
changing demographics of an aging workforce. While individuals have taken it upon themselves to incorporate knowledge transfer methods when working with potential successors, it becomes incumbent on the colleges to address the issues institutionally. They cannot do it without cooperation at all levels of the organization, and their importance must be made clear and prioritized accordingly.

To conclude, two statements come to the mind of the researcher when considering just how important this issue is to community colleges. These are thanks to Elnore, whose somewhat flippant comment when asked about succession planning in the CCC environment was laughter and “well how ‘bout some?” This response sums up the lack of action on the part of individuals and colleges in addressing succession planning. Which brings us to Elnore’s follow-up of “well, yeah, I suppose it’s not funny.” And it isn’t funny; it is unacceptable not to consider the loss of public benefit that is occurring. And in a system whose economic impact is in the hundreds of billions of dollars, losing potential resources that equate to virtually millennia of irreplaceable experience is not only unacceptable, it is unconscionable.


Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: ___________________ Time:_______________

Place: ________________________________________________

Interviewer: ___________________________________________

Interviewee: ___________________________________________

1) What year did you retire from the California Community College system?
2) How long did you serve in senior administrative position(s) (Vice President, Director, Dean)?
3) What were your experiences with knowledge management and succession planning over the course of your career?
4) What was the duration of time between formally announcing your retirement and your final day of work in your position?
   a) Months, days, years
5) What were your experiences with the following “before” announcing your retirement?
   a) Knowledge management
      i) Storage of or recording of organizational history or tacit/explicit knowledge
         (researcher will provide examples/definitions as necessary)
      ii) Prioritization of knowledge management within your job functions
   b) Knowledge transfer
      i) What types of information were shared?
      ii) What methods were used for sharing knowledge?
   c) Succession planning
      i) Were possible successors identified for your position?
   d) Multigenerational workforce
6) What were your experiences with the following “after” announcing your retirement?
   a) Knowledge management
      i) Storage of or recording of organizational history or tacit/explicit knowledge
      ii) Prioritization of knowledge management within your job functions
   b) Knowledge transfer
      i) What types of information were shared?
      ii) What methods were used for sharing knowledge?
   c) Succession planning
      i) Were possible successors identified for your position?
   d) Multigenerational workforce
7) Did your former institution(s) have a succession plan in place?
   a) What did the plan entail? Was it formal/informal?
   b) What about an ongoing or emergency vacancy replacement plan?
   c) Do any artifacts exist relative to the plan(s)?
8) How were knowledge management and/or transfer addressed in your institution(s)?
   a) New employees?
b) Current employees?
c) Retiring employees?

9) Please describe any mentoring or leadership development programs in which you played a role.
   a) What was your role?
   b) How did your role change over the course of your career?

10) Please describe any other mentoring or leadership development programs that existed at your former institution(s).

11) Have you participated in any mentoring relationships or leadership development programs since your retirement?
   a) Please describe the mentoring relationships/leadership development programs.

12) Have you returned to your former institution(s) in a consultant capacity, or have you been contacted by them for knowledge you possess about your former position(s)?
   a) What were the types of information/support/consultancy you provided?
   b) How did you share the knowledge?

13) In reflecting on your experiences, what if any recommendations would you make for future practice?
   a) Individual preparation
   b) Organizational preparation

14) Is there any information we haven’t covered that you think would inform the research?

15) Anything else you would like to add or clarify?
Appendix B: Interview Script

1) Turn off cell phone
2) Personal Introductions
3) Introduction to the topic and problem statement
4) Consent conversation
5) Consent form
   a) Review
   b) Sign
   c) Provide a copy
6) Recording process
   a) Multiple recorders
   b) Storage of digital recordings
7) Set-up recorders
8) Field notes explanation
   a) Observations
   b) Notebook
   c) Storage of data
9) Comfort conversation
   a) No question is required
   b) Participant may end interview at any time
10) Start interview using Protocol
11) Wrap-up
12) Thank you
13) Next steps/timeline
14) Turn off recorders
Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in a Qualitative Research Study on Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning

Dear <NAME>:

My name is Jennifer Coleman and I am contacting you today as a doctoral student at Drexel University. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree, I am conducting a study focused on the lived experiences of individuals as they transitioned into retirement from roles as senior leaders in California Community Colleges. I am writing to request your participation in my study, titled “A Phenomenological Study of the Knowledge Transfer and Succession Planning Experiences of Senior Leaders Retired from the California Community College System.”

California Community Colleges (CCCs) are facing an ongoing wave of baby boomer retirements that started many years ago and hasn’t yet crested. With their retirements comes the potential to lose the “deep smarts” these leaders bring to their organizations, gained through decades of experience. With a dedication to succession planning and knowledge management and transfer, institutions can work to capture some of this organizational history and information before it is lost forever.

This qualitative study looks at the first step in this equation - the lived experiences of a select group of individuals as they retired from senior leadership roles in California Community Colleges. The phenomenological approach allows for patterns to emerge regarding the knowledge transfer and succession planning experiences of these leaders both before and after announcing their retirements. This information will frame future conversations about knowledge transfer and succession planning and the perceived importance of sharing organizational information before and during the retirement process.

Your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to engage in a semi-structured interview. The duration of the interview will last up to an hour and will take place at a mutually agreeable location. The open-ended questions that will be asked during the interview session will allow me as the researcher to gain insights into your lived experiences and the common phenomena that are shared by those from similar backgrounds.

Should you agree to participate in the study, all reasonable steps will be taken to maintain confidentiality and to safeguard your identity as a study participant. Information gleaned from the interviews will maintained securely during the research period, and audio recordings of the interviews destroyed following completion of the study. Further, no personally identifiable information arising from your participation will be shared. Research findings will be reported in aggregate so as to protect the identity of participants. Your volunteering for an interview will begin the consent process for you to
participate in the study. You may opt out at any time. If you have any concerns or questions about this study please feel free to ask at any time.

Thank you in advance for considering participation in this research. I look forward to hearing from you via email or phone to set-up an interview.

Sincerely,

~ Jennifer L. Coleman
Doctoral Candidate
Drexel University
Center for Graduate Studies, Sacramento