



Leadership Strategies in High Performing Community Colleges: *A Qualitative Phenomenological Study*

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Advocacy

Advocacy defined by the American Association of Community Colleges (2013)

Successful leader advocacy is defined as valuing and promoting diversity and inclusion, demonstrating a passion for and a commitment to the mission of community colleges, advancing lifelong learning, supporting a learner-centered environment, and representing the community college in the local community and throughout the broader educational community (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Advocacy defined by High Performance Leadership Study (2014)

High performing community college leaders diligently focus on sharing impact stories that illustrate how community colleges change the lives of students. High performing leaders are actively involved in building communities where people want to live, skilled at identifying, building, and maintaining authentic relationships, and intrinsically motivated to elevate the reputation of community colleges.

Collaboration

Collaboration defined by the American Association of Community Colleges (2013)

Effective collaboration in leadership is defined as embracing and employing the diversity of individuals and cultures, demonstrating cultural competencies, catalyzing involvement and commitment of all stakeholders, and building and leveraging networks and partnerships to advance the goals of the college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Collaboration defined by High Performance Leadership Study (2014)

High performing community college leaders are skilled listeners who effectively build relationships and partnerships with internal and external stakeholders. The leader actively operates in a collaborative paradigm, remaining committed to mutual benefits in outcomes. High performing community college leaders build culture based on dialogue and participatory decision-making because the leader recognizes the college cannot achieve high performance without engagement and ownership.

Communication

Communication defined by the American Association of Community Colleges (2013)

Effective leadership communication is defined as disseminating and supporting policies and strategies; creating and maintaining open communications regarding resources, priorities, and expectations; listening actively to understand, comprehend, analyze and engage; and projecting confidence and responding responsibly (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Communication defined by High Performance Leadership Study (2014)

High performing leaders seek input about how messages are received, involve administrative team members in communication efforts through an understood communication protocol, strategize about tone, message intention, and unintended consequences of message misinterpretation, and discern ordinary dissent from cultural dissonance.

Organizational Strategy

Organizational strategy defined by the American Association of Community Colleges (2013)

Effective organizational strategy in leadership is defined as the successful assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the community college; proven data-driven strategy alignment; development of an innovative culture; and alignment of the community college's mission, structures, and resources (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Organizational strategy defined by High Performance Leadership Study (2014)

High performing leaders are tirelessly focused on student success. The focus on students and achieving the community college mission permeates all decisions, financial resources, human resources, and partnerships. High performing leaders harness the enthusiasm of early adapters rather than waiting for everyone to get on board. They focus on systems thinking and systems improvements to lead the community college to high performance.

Professionalism

Professionalism defined by the American Association of Community Colleges (2013)

Professionalism is defined as being authentic and visionary, understanding and endorsing the culture of community colleges, managing stress through self-care and balance, and promoting and maintaining high standards for personal and community college integrity, honesty, and respect for people (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Professionalism defined by High Performance Leadership Study (2014)

High performing community college leaders act with integrity and humility. They communicate and maintain high standards and take deep responsibility for their actions and the actions of all members of the college community. Even in difficult times, high performing leaders remain future-focused and optimistic.

Resource Management

Resource management defined by the American Association of Community Colleges (2013)

Effective resource management in leadership is defined as the successful development and management of resources, an entrepreneurial approach to alternative funding sources, efficient human resource practices and performance management systems, and positive management of conflict (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Financial resource management defined by High Performance Leadership Study (2014)

High performing community college leaders build partnerships to leverage the limited and declining resources of community colleges. Through all fiscal elements and phases, high performing leaders are transparent in budget planning, spending, and reduction processes.

People resource management defined by High Performance Leadership Study (2014)

High performing community college leaders value employee engagement and recognizing the skills and talents of team members. They invest in professional development and distribute leadership throughout the organization. High performing leaders consider hiring team members one of the biggest leadership priorities, and they do not hire people who do not fit the organizational mission and strategic directions. Leaders who achieve high performance make tough decisions about people who are not helping the college move forward toward meeting strategic priorities because they recognize that not holding everyone to high standards impacts the organization on a much broader level.

Overall Leadership Strategies for Community College High Performance

Community college leaders may benefit from considering the overall strategies for high performance presented by participating leaders. The following recommendations can help community college leaders develop effective leadership strategies:

1. People are the heart of the community college. The lives of students change because of the teaching, caring, and service of the people in the community college. Leaders who focus on hiring, developing, engaging, and collaborating with the best people will reach high performance. Focus on people, and high performance will surface.
2. Focus on three to five key strategic initiatives each academic cycle. High performance leaders stay on track with a small number of initiatives and remain consistent in focus, message, metrics, and outcome reporting. The focus builds a culture of committed people moving in the same direction, therefore increasing performance in other areas as well.
3. The leadership/organizational fit is critical for high performance. High performing leaders are loyal to the mission and strategic direction of their particular institution—not just any community college.
4. Leaders will never make everyone happy. Focusing on the people who are unhappy negatively impacts movement toward high performance. Harnessing the energy of the people who are ready to achieve greatness is an effective strategy for high performance.
5. There are real highs and lows in the leadership role. As long as the leader remains focused on the success of students, he or she can achieve high performance.
6. The issue, not the person or his or her organizational status, should determine the leader's focus, attention, and level of prioritization.
7. Every day, every conversation, and every act of the leader sets the organization's tone and develops the organizational culture. Taking time to develop thoughtful communications is essential for high performance.
8. Consistency in actions and vision as well as an unwavering focus on the community college mission impacts high performance. Stakeholders may not always like the decisions, actions, or focus of the leader, but they will continue to respect an unwavering and consistent approach.
9. High performing leaders are humbly aware of their impact. The community college reputation and achievement of outcomes depends on the interactions, decisions, partnership opportunities, and relationship outcomes of the leader.
10. Community college strategic directions cannot be abandoned. There are distractions that emerge on a daily or hourly basis. New initiatives, accountability measures, and fads have the potential to send the leadership team and community college stakeholders down paths that do not lead to high performance. Leaders must tirelessly shift back to the strategic directions and away from distractions.



REFERENCES

American Association of Community Colleges. (2013). Competencies for community college leaders (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/newsevents/Events/leadershipsuite/Pages/competencies.aspx>

5 Outcome:
Community College High Performance

Community college high performance is defined by strong outcome performance in the following areas:

- Labor market
- Completion
- Learning
- Equitable access and success

Source: 2013 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. www.aspeninstitute.org

1 The community college leader's **values and beliefs** regarding:

Standards •

• Purpose

• Relationships

• Authenticity

• Loyalty

• Talent Management

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The strategy implementation, guided by the values and beliefs, **creates a culture of engagement and collaboration.**

The leader's values and beliefs guide his or her strategies related to the AACC leader competencies:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Advocacy
- Professionalism
- Resource management
- Organizational strategy

Source: American Association of Community Colleges "Competencies for Community College Leaders". www.aacc.nch.edu

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The community culture of **engagement and collaboration** strengthens:

- Reputation
- Trust
- Commitment
- Ownership