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## A Qualitative Study to Discover and Describe Conflict Strategies Used by Exemplar Community College Presidents to Proactively Transform and Resolve Conflict as They Attempt to Shape the Future

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A Qualitative Study to Discover and Describe Conflict Strategies Used by Exemplar  
Community College Presidents who Proactively Transform and Resolve Conflict

A Dissertation Proposal by

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Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

March, 2016

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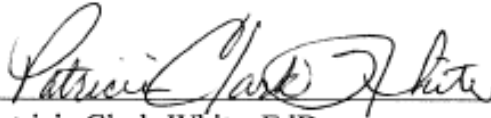
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A Qualitative Study to Discover and Describe Conflict Strategies Used by Exemplar  
Community College Presidents who Proactively Transform and Resolve Conflict

A Dissertation Proposal by

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by

Karen J. Bolton

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## ABSTRACT

### A Qualitative Study to Discover and Describe Conflict Strategies Used by Exemplar Community College Presidents who Proactively Transform and Resolve Conflict

by Karen J. Bolton

The purpose of this thematic, qualitative phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of exemplar community college presidents in the use of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground (collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and process) to achieve breakthrough results and transform conflict. This study considered the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of exemplar leaders. To know and understand how successful community college presidents operated in their environment was both practical and significant. The need to research and study these leaders included understanding how they work through and transform conflict. The findings from this research illustrated how they used the six behavioral domains to transform conflict to achieve common ground. Further research should be widened to include a cross-section of community college presidents from other states, and a future study that examines how presidents leadership may or may not be impacted by being an introvert vs. extrovert impacts their ability to lead is a. The information and results of this study were combined with the peer-researchers' findings who are studying exemplar leaders in other fields of work to support future research of common ground and the six domains.

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## PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study common ground in multiple types of organizations, three staff researchers and 10 doctoral students discovered a common interest in development of the common ground principles that resulted in the goal of a thematic study. The goal of the study was to discover and describe how successful exemplar leaders established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving and process. This topic was selected for my dissertation because of my role as a tenured faculty member in the Washington (WA) State community college system. My work on this topic has been rewarding because it allowed me to examine the inner workings of the community colleges in my state, and add to the body of knowledge on the topic of conflict and common ground.

Throughout the study, the term “peer researchers” is used to refer to the other researchers who conducted this thematic study. My fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied exemplar leaders in the following fields: Ambra Dodds, K-12 Superintendents in midsize California (CA) school districts; Alida Stanowicz, female business leaders in CA; Christopher Fuzie, municipal police chiefs in Northern CA; Darin Hand, WA State mayors; Tamarah Tilos, directors of mental health organizations in the United States; Monique Ouwinga, CA college presidents in non-profit independent colleges and universities; Jennifer Marzocca, WA State nonprofit leaders; Denise LaRue, human resource executives in mid-size CA school districts; and I studied the lived experiences of WA State community college presidents.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

During his 2015 State of the Union address, President Obama, proposed to make community college free for responsible individuals (Obama, 2015). This announcement brought community colleges into the American spotlight, which in turn resulted in increased scrutiny about how these institutions were run (Boggs, 2011). With the economic downturn, more individuals sought retraining and entry into four-year institutions (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011). Community college presidents are positioning their institutions to meet this growing need by focusing on workforce development, remediation services, and classes that provide people with the skills needed to succeed at universities (Boggs, 2011). While at the same time, these presidents understand that they are at the crossroads of maintaining open access while balancing the needs of their followers to achieve the goals of the organization, while adding to the challenge and pressure of raising the performance standards, all with reduced funding (Gould, Wong, & Weitz, 2014).

Community colleges became centers of educational opportunity that responded to the unique needs of the local areas they serve. Committed to accessibility and affordability, community colleges offer open-admission policies, relatively low tuition costs, and serve students of diverse ages, academic preparation levels, ethnic and cultural heritages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Community colleges became vital components in support of the health and economic wellbeing of the communities they served (Plinske & Packard, 2010), and the college presidents must balance serving the needs of a wide range of stakeholders.

The current community college systems are complex organizations with a multitude of stakeholders who hold vested interests in the success of the organization, which is vastly different from those earlier years. Working to balance the various needs of different stakeholder groups can often result in conflict, forcing community college presidents to be adept in conflict management. Pettitt and Ayers (2002), who wrote that leaders, in the community college setting, must understand and be knowledgeable regarding conflict and how to resolve conflict to be successful in their organizations.

Community college presidents are responsible for meeting and balancing the needs of the organization, which includes managing conflict. When conflicts arise and are not handled promptly, the balance could be difficult to restore (Putman & Wilson, 1982). Failing to manage conflict is not an option, and for those community college presidents who struggled to resolve conflict and failed to restore order within their organization, often resulted in a loss of confidence, which could lead to a shortened tenure. Within the community college system, Putman and Wilson (1982) described conflict as a result of interpersonal communication behavior among individuals within the organization.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, American community colleges are expected to face some of their greatest challenges as they cope with fewer resources, shrinking enrollments, changing demographics, and increasing demands for job skills from graduates (Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 2014). The community colleges that succeed in this changing landscape will be those headed by transformational leaders. Based on a study of 256 exemplary community college presidents, Roueche et al. (2014) described these leaders as leaders with the ability to influence the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of faculty and



staff by working with and through them to accomplish the mission and purpose of the college.

When examining transformational leaders and conflict, a pivotal study of transformational leaders within the community college system conducted by Rouche et al. (2014) described transformational leadership as “the ability of the community college CEO to influence the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of others by working with and through them in order to accomplish the college’s mission and purpose” (p. 318). This suggested that those transformational community college presidents must work to transform their organization, specifically in terms of working through conflict to find common ground. This theory was supported by the work of Eddy (2005), who also suggested that presidents continuously work to find common ground with key stakeholders in the organization. Managing conflict requires leaders to be cognizant of their surroundings and be able to balance the needs of many while still staying focused on the mission of the college. Exemplary community college presidents utilized a set of principles and practices that caused a fundamental shift in relationships that allowed individuals to work through conflict creatively and promoted a peaceful co-existence (Gray, 1989).

Rouche et al. (2014) noted that all community college presidents faced conflict on a daily basis, although the research noted that some presidents managed conflict better than their counterparts. This difference provided an opportunity to better understand how those exemplary community college presidents led their organizations by managing that conflict.

Never before has the community college system been in the national spotlight; these institutions were originally established to serve the local communities in both rural areas and in large cities. At the helm of these institutions are the community college presidents. As of 2014, a large number of these leaders were retiring, which means that another group of leaders will need to rise up to take their places (Roueche et al., 2014). As such, knowing and understanding conflict, and how to manage the conflict, could make the difference between being successful or facing a shortened tenure.

### **Background**

Conflict is a natural part of relationships (Bass & Avolio, 1993), and in the case of the community college president, resolving conflict is a vital part of their day-to-day responsibilities. Leaders often fear conflict because it can lead to negative consequences if handled poorly. However, Lederach (2003) found that many people believed conflict happened for a reason and if managed, could bring much-needed change to the organization. Therefore, eliminating conflict would also eliminate the dynamic and positive function it serves. In transformational leadership, conflict is viewed as an opportunity for constructive change rather than something that should be eliminated (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). Exemplary leaders understand this notion and embrace conflict and change as it naturally occurs, and are skilled in addressing it. This study aimed to examine those transformational leaders within the community college setting so as to better understand their role in establishing common ground to transform conflict.

## **Community Colleges**

Community colleges have become centers of educational opportunity, responding to the unique needs of the local communities they serve. Committed to accessibility and affordability, community colleges have open-admission policies and relatively low tuition costs, and they serve students of diverse ages, academic preparation levels, ethnic and cultural heritages, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Community colleges have become vital components in support of the health and economic well-being of the communities they serve (Plinske & Packard, 2010).

Community colleges are expected to serve the needs of their local communities. The leaders of these organizations, college presidents, are called on to lead this collaboration between the college, stakeholders, faculty, staff, and the community. Presidents, however, are affected by a number of factors that contribute to shortened tenures, including a lack of training, the inability to collaborate, and the inability to find common ground during conflict (Zanjani, 2012). Because conflict is situational and local, leaders must be direct while at the same time building consensus through collaboration, which is how transformational leaders find common ground (Tekniepe, 2014).

## **Community College Presidents**

Vaughn (1986) is a leading researcher of community college presidents; in his work, he made a number of observations about the role and responsibilities of the president. The president of a community college is hired by the Board of Trustees and serves as the chief executive officer for the college. It is the board that is responsible legally and financially for the college. When the president makes decisions, it is on

behalf of the Board of Trustees. Because the board is made up of ordinary citizens, they rely on the president for the leadership of the college. Any power that the president has, comes from and is delegated by the Board of Trustees (Vaughan, 1986).

Researchers Hay (2006) and Vaughan (1990) noted a need to more fully understand the role of the community college president so as to gain an enhanced appreciation for the possibilities and limitations of the institution influenced by this critical position. Vaughan (1986) indicated that the three most important functions of the president are (a) managing the institution, (b) creating the campus climate, and (c) interpreting and communicating the mission of the college.

### **Community College Presidents and Conflict**

Community college presidents face difficult situations throughout their tenure as president (Tekniepe, 2014). The president of a community college typically makes decisions as a result of some sort of conflict. The majority of the conflict is internal and within the college grounds. However, not all conflict is bad; conflict can inspire and motivate, or it can derail the mission of the organization. Typically, conflict can arise between the faculty, union, and administration; between faculty and students; or between the faculty and administrators. According to Moody (1978), to resolve conflict, the president must try to find common ground among stakeholders.

Conflict is a natural part of relationships (Bass & Avolio, 1993), and in the case of the presidents, managing conflict is a vital part of their responsibilities. Lederach and Maiese (2003) stated that many people believe conflict happens for a reason and that it brings much needed change. Therefore, to eliminate conflict would also eliminate

conflict's dynamic power. In transformation, conflict should be changed into something constructive rather than being eliminated altogether.

In their article, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Practices Needed for Higher Education, Eddy, Murphy, Spaulding, and Chandras (1998) suggested certain areas in which new and strategic leadership practices were necessary. The new leadership, according to Eddy et al. (1998), must take new directions in ethics, collaboration, accountability, privatization, international and distance education, volunteerism, and multiculturalism. Of these, ethics and collaboration are two of the six domains for common ground.

For this study, it was important to review the most current and relevant work in regard to the community college presidents and the role they play in transforming their organization. One such study by Hay (2006) identified the need to more fully understand the role of the community college president to gain an enhanced appreciation for the potential and limitations of this critical position on the institution. Bagadiong (2014) further highlighted the need to examine exemplary leaders in higher education because of the anticipated gap in leadership due to the number of retirements of community college presidents and other high ranking college leaders expected in the near future.

Across the country, several hundred new administrators will step into the leadership role of the president, the majority of whom lack formal training for that position. Few developmental programs, training, or specific educational opportunities are available to adequately prepare the next generation of community college presidents to become transformational leaders (Bagadiong, 2014).

Reed (2012) disclosed a profound fact in his book *Confessions of a Community College Administrator*. He shared that the next generation of community college

presidents will have a tough time navigating the political waters. To survive, they will have to adapt and deal with conflict at all levels of the organization (Reed, 2012).

A number of studies noted the difficult situations presidents dealt with throughout their tenure as president. This theory was heavily cited in literature works by Cohoen, Brawer, & Kisker (2013), Lahr et al. (2014), Reed (2012), and Roueche et al. (2014), all works that outlined the pressures of the office of president. The study by Cohoen and Brawer (2008) was significant because it identified a number of challenges leaders are faced with during their tenure as president. Roueche et al. (2014) reported on the same types of challenges, such as faculty contract issues, student complaints, Title IX requirements, and diversity and inclusion issues. All, if not handled properly, could result in an institution losing funding, which is directly related to failed leadership and could mean a loss of support by stakeholders causing conflict (Reed, 2012). As the highest leadership position at the college, the president is often the final decision-maker when there is some sort of conflict within the college. Good conflict can inspire and motivate whereas bad conflict can derail the mission of the organization, which contributes to president moving away from the bad conflict (Pettitt & Ayers, 2002). At the college level, conflict can arise among the faculty, union, and administration; between faculty and students; or between the faculty and administrators. Moody (1978) wrote that to resolve conflict, the president must work to find common ground among stakeholders, which included identifying specific processes that were unique to each stakeholder group.

In a recent study by Garfield (2015), that is centered on affirmative action and higher education. There are a number of campuses across the country that is embroiled in conflict over race, and at the center of this conflict, is the University of Missouri

(Garfield, 2015). The conflict that erupted at the campus was all centered on the failure of the Chancellor and president failure to address campus hate speech. Their failure to resolve conflict and find common ground, led to a shorten tenure; ultimately they resigned their positions.

One particular issue that caused conflict was the need to be ready for future growth during a decline in resources. This was supported by Eddy et al. (1998) who noted areas in which new and strategic leadership practices were necessary for the future, including the need for new directions in ethics, collaboration, accountability, privatization, international and distance education, volunteerism, and multiculturalism.

One of the key leadership components of any leader is the ability to be able to communicate the mission, vision, and goals of the institution. Pettit and Ayers (2002) noted that an effective climate for communication required mutual trust and processes for sharing information throughout the organization. Part of a leader's role in establishing this climate was to be an ethical and moral example of behaviors that required trust and openness when communicating (Vaughan, 1990).

In a closely related study, Eddy (2005) examined nine community college presidents and found that exemplary leaders served an important function in guiding their institutions during turbulent times. Eddy noted that during those stressful times, especially when a major change occurred, the institutions looked to the president for guidance. However, it was also noted that the presidents first needed to understand their surroundings to guide decision-making with subordinates and other leadership on campus and understand the changing role of their leadership before they could provide support to

others (Eddy, 2005). This study showed a need to further understand those who serve in the office of college president.

A significant amount of literature focused on the community college president, specifically around leadership theory and leadership styles. Bass and Avolio's (1993) study focused on the responsibility of the president to resolve conflict. Putman and Wilson (1982), Pettit and Ayers (2002), and more recently Roueche et al. (2014) all focused primarily on the behaviors of the community college president. These studies are an indication that important variables were missing, such as how exemplar community college presidents fill the role of leader and break through conflict.

### **Six Domains of Conflict Transformation Behaviors in Common Ground Collaboration**

For this study, collaboration was defined by the peer-researchers as, "The ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allows for achievement or acceptance of agreed upon goals" Potts and Catledg (1996) stated that establishing common ground was a long and lengthy process, noting that exemplary leaders understand that maintaining conflict, even when the result could be a temporary agreement, was necessary at times to get individuals to find common ground. In addition, the authors noted a high level of complexity when trying to establish and maintain common ground when the size of the collaborating group was large, such as with community college teams. The larger number of people in the collaborative group made the situations more complex, which made finding common ground more difficult (Potts & Catledg, 1996).



## **Communication**

For this study, communication was defined as, “The transferring of meaning from sender to receiver, while overcoming noise and filters, so that the intended meaning is received by the intended recipient” (Daft, 2012; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2009; Maxwell, 2010; Schermerhorn, Osborn, & Hunt, 2008; Stuart, 2014; Wyatt, 2014).

Within the community college system, communication is vital. Duignan (2012) noted that educational leaders typically devised new, engaging, and creative ways to engage and communicate with their stakeholders to keep everyone informed.

## **Emotional Intelligence**

For this study, emotional intelligence was defined by the peer-research team as, “The self-awareness of one’s own emotions and motivations, and the ability to understand the emotions of others in social settings, which allows for management of behavior and relationships.” Emotional intelligence should be thought of as the ability to understand one’s own emotions as well as accurately evaluate and interpret the emotions of others (Van Rooy, 2004).

## **Ethics**

The peer-researchers defined ethics as, Human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way, given the values and morals of the culture. Human beings typically are moral agents. Singer (2011) stated that ethics were both practical and moral, noting that it is not about theory but rather the practice of ethics.

## **Problem-Solving**

In the ever-changing environment of higher education, leaders must be decisive, stand by their decisions, and problem-solve, especially during times of conflict. To

accomplish this, Duignan (2012) reported the leader of the institution should work collaboratively with others to evaluate, review, analyze, and decide on a course of action. The decision-making process is needed when change is unexpected and individuals within the organization are not prepared or unwilling to support the change, even if it is needed. Exemplar leaders understood that when change was unexpected, it caused a threat to the well-being of the college and disrupted the tenure of the president (Wenrich, 1980). Murray and Kishur (2008) supported this concept and noted that when confronted with unexpected and major challenges during the day-to-day operations of community colleges, presidents typically relied on their best judgment when making routine decisions.

### **Process**

Process was defined by the peer-research team as a method that includes a set of steps and activities that group members follow to perform tasks such as strategic planning or conflict resolution. The three levels of process include process design, process methods, and process tools. The operational definition developed for the study was any internal, external, or systemic pattern of behavior organized in a step-by-step order or action to achieve a goal, function, or end product.

This phenomenological study sought to further discover and describe how successful community college presidents establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

The literature review supported the need for this study, stressing the importance of the community college president who is vital in terms of leading the institution into the

future, collaborating with the community, communicating, solving problems, maintaining high ethics, and resolving conflict.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Lovett (2002) suggested college presidents must find common ground with the Board of Trustees, students, faculty, and staff to best support the needs of the community and fulfill the mission of the college. In addition to managing relationships with stakeholders, the presidents often faced a reduced workforce, limited funds, and issues related to increased tuition and fees for students (Lovett, 2002).

In WA State, community college presidents are guided by the 2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education (Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2008), which called for a 40% increase in the annual number of residents earning degrees and certificates by 2018. The current economic climate and recession, as well as their impact on higher education funding, hampered efforts toward meeting this goal (Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2012).

The Office of Financial Management for the state of WA requested a 15% reduction to their institutional operating budgets (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2014). These cuts translated into decreased course offerings, increased tuition, increased class size, and a reduction in services (Reed, 2012). These cuts showed the political framework within which a community college president works on a daily basis; it was a balancing act as the president strove to meet the needs of many with fewer resources. During times of fiscal exigency, the power structure started and ended with the president (Brown, Martinez, & Daniel, 2002). With the economic crisis, reduced Federal spending on education, and increased student populations at

colleges, campuses were forced to cut their budgets and find ways to adjust to the change (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). Those tough decisions were typically made by the college president (Arnone, 2003).

Wenrich (1980) found that community college presidents reported struggling to be all things to all people and difficulty in balancing the needs of diverse stakeholders. Truly transformative leaders, in particular community college presidents, noted that it was virtually impossible to avoid serious conflicts (Eddy et al., 1998). Rather than avoid it, exemplary leaders viewed conflict as a way to motivate people to want and embrace change (Pettit & Ayers, 2002).

According to March and Weiner (2003), leaders faced difficult circumstances, and in the case of community college presidents, they continually dealt with deepening budget cuts while trying to balance the needs of the college and the community. With the nature of their work, exemplary community college presidents must work collaboratively with stakeholders and find common ground when traversing diverse viewpoints.

Despite the overwhelming literature conducted on community college presidents and how they construct their leadership, there was little regarding how exemplar community college presidents were able to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

The lack of literature indicates that more information is needed on the strategies used by exemplar community college presidents in transforming conflict to achieve common ground. This phenomenon was investigated using the theoretical framework of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have

on achieving common ground. The domains are as follows: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and processes.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how successful community college presidents establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

### **Research Questions**

The research was guided by one central question and six more detailed questions, one aligned with each of the six domains. The central question of the study was: What are the lived experiences of successful community college presidents in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground? The six sub-questions were:

1. Collaboration. How do successful community college presidents use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
2. Communication. How do successful community college presidents use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
3. Emotional intelligence. What aspects of emotional intelligence do successful community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
4. Ethics. How do successful community college presidents use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

5. Problem-solving. How do successful community college presidents use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
6. Processes. What processes do successful community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

### **Significance of the Problem**

According to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (2015), the role of the community college is to develop a skilled labor pool that helps feed the state's economy. To fulfill this role, the college offers educational building blocks with multiple entry, reentry, and exit points in order to enhance student success.

Community college presidents work in an environment that is politically charged, ever-changing, and serves as a vital resource to the community that relies on the institution for workforce development, remedial education, and continuing education (Altbach et al., 2011; Plinske & Packard, 2010). Understanding how community college presidents successfully operated within this environment was both practical and significant (Aspen Institute, 2013). Jenkins (2011) supported the need to study community college presidents to learn from their experiences at setting expectations and driving a vision toward success. Hockaday and Puyear (2000) also noted that the next generation of leaders would benefit from a study that focused on how to be successful in complex organizations such as community colleges. Additionally, administrators at all levels of higher education could gain valuable insights from these leaders about how to find common ground in resolving conflict and how they used the six domains of conflict

transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground in their work (Hockaday & Puyear, 2000).

Research regarding the six domains and their application was not present during a review of the literature. The domains individually were readily referenced in a number of resources, but at no time were they applied together. There was also a significant amount of literature on community college presidents, how they lead, communicate, their ethics, and preparation to for the role of president. Authors March and Weiner (2003), Lovett (2002), and Hockaday and Pyear (2000) all detailed the challenges the presidents faced that resulted in a significant amount of conflict, specifically in how they led their organizations. However, little literature was available that outlined how community college presidents utilized the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. This study was designed to fill this gap by exploring how the presidents established and maintained common ground to resolve conflict within the framework of the six domains of conflict transformation.

When examining community colleges presidents, the literature noted that these leaders must establish collaborations between the college and the community to ensure the needs of the community were met. Failure to do so often limited the effectiveness of the president and resulted in a shorter tenure as president (Zanjani, 2012). The inability to collaborate and the inability to find common ground during conflict were both cited as factors that contributed to shortened tenure (Zanjani, 2012).

Eddy (2005) conducted research that concluded there was a need to fully understand community college presidents, so as to add to the body of literature while also providing information to graduate programs poised to provide the most current

information to the next generation of community college leaders. Currently, in WA State there is one leadership development program designed for the community and technical college system. The Washington Executive Leadership Academy (WELA) is yearlong program designed for those individuals seeking vice president or president positions. The focus of WELA is on resume writing, applications and interviews, and mentorship by two individuals per student. Currently, WELA offers no professional education or training on establishing common ground. This study is situated to discover and describe how successful community college presidents establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

### **Definitions**

This section provides definitions of all terms that are relevant to the study. Some are theoretical definitions that give meaning in terms of the theories of a specific discipline whereas others are operational definitions for the purposes of this study. The terms were derived from the research and agreed upon by the peer researchers involved in the thematic study.

*Common Ground* (Theoretical definition). An interplay of intentions of people from different sociocultural backgrounds, differences, and cultures while finding a foundation of common interest or comprehension (Horowitz, 2000; Jacobsen, 2000; Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Snowe, 2013; Tan & Manca, 2013).

Common Ground (Operational definition). When all parties involved aspire to, and willing to work towards, a new vision of the future together, one that meets everyone's deep-seated concerns and values (Search for Common Ground, 2016).



*Collaboration.* The ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allows for achievement or acceptance of agreed upon goals (Hansen, 2013).

*Communication.* The transferring of meaning from sender to receiver, while overcoming noise and filters, so that the intended meaning is received by the intended recipient (Daft, 2012; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2009; Maxwell, 2010; Schermerhorn, Osborn, & Hunt, 2008; Stuart, 2014; Wyatt, 2014).

*Conflict.* Any cognitive (perceptual), emotional (feeling), and behavioral (action) dimension that differs from another cognitive (perceptual), emotional (feeling), and/or behavioral (action) dimension. This difference can be individual or collective (Kouzakova, Ellemers, Harinck, & Scheepers, 2012; Mayer, 2012).

*Conflict Transformation.* Conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships (Lederach, 2003; Ty, 2011).

*Ethics.* Human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way given the values and morals of the culture (Ciulla, 1995; Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005).

*Emotional Intelligence.* The self-awareness of one's own emotions and motivations, and the ability to understand the emotions of others in social settings, which allows for management of behavior and relationships (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004).

*Exemplar.* Someone set apart from peers in a superior manner, suitable for use as an example to model behavior, principles, or intentions (Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014).

*Problem-Solving.* The act of choosing and implementing a solution to an identified problem or situation (Harvey, Bearley, & Corkrum, 1997).

*Process.* Any internal, external, or systemic pattern of behavior organized in a step-by-step order or action to achieve a goal, function, or end product (Hamme, 2015).

### **Delimitations**

For the purpose of this study, the study was delimited to the 34 community colleges within WA State. There are currently 34 community colleges presidents. The study was further delimited to 12 to 15 exemplary community college presidents within WA State so as to allow for the collection of in-depth interviews, observations, and relevant artifacts.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study was divided into five chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study, along with background information, the statement of the problem, the significance of the problem, definitions of terms, and study delimitations. Chapter II provides an examination of the literature on community college presidents, how they find common ground, and details about the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground. Chapter III presents the methodology used in the study, including the population and sample as well as the criteria for selection of the individuals for the study. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study, including a detailed analysis of the data. Chapter V provides an interpretation

of the data, draws conclusions based on the analysis, presents implications for actions, and offers recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Throughout their tenure, community college presidents face a myriad of difficult situations and decisions, and most are the result of some sort of conflict (Pettitt & Ayers, 2002). Pettitt and Ayers (2002) noted that transformative leaders understood the importance of conflict and that conflict had both positive and negative aspects; it could either motivate and inspire or derail the mission of the organization. Typically, conflict can rise between the faculty union and administration, between faculty and students, and between the faculty and administrators. Moody (1978), stated that to resolve conflict, a community college president must try to find common ground among stakeholders on a daily basis. The skilled exemplar community college president was able to manage conflict and used it as a team-builder to find common ground throughout the college campus (Gillet-Karam, 1999).

A review of the literature was conducted to provide a historical background and theoretical context for the study. It begins with a discussion of common ground, followed by research about the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground. A succinct overview of each domain is presented along with how it applies to community college presidents. This is followed by literature related to conflict, including defining conflict and the implications of conflict, as well as an overview of community colleges and the role of the college president. Next is a comparison of the six domains and leadership styles, which is relevant to the study of community college presidents. The chapter concludes with an overview of exemplar leaders in higher education and how they utilize the six domains to transform conflict.

## **Common Ground**

Common ground has been defined for this research by the peer-researchers as:

“When all parties involved aspire to, and are willing to work towards, a new vision of the future together, one that meets everyone’s deep-seated concerns and values” (Daft, 2012; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004; Maxwell, 2010; Schermerhorn, Osborn, & Hunt, 2008; Stuart, 2014; Wyatt, 2014).

Finding common ground refers to the interactions of people from different sociocultural backgrounds, genders, understandings, or perspectives working together toward establishing a foundation of common interests or comprehension (Horowitz, 2007; Jacobsen, 2000; Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Snowe, 2013; Tan & Manca, 2013). The process of finding common ground can be time consuming because it requires individuals to engage in relationship building and to identify shared interests by all parties, which are aimed at overcoming differences (Potts & Catledge, 1996). Campolo (2005) and Jacobosen (2000), both support the fact that when processes are in place to resolve conflict, individuals learned to live and work together successfully because they identified shared values and interests (Campolo, 2005; Jacobsen, 2000).

Common ground practices on the community college campus are essential given the pressures of an ever-changing educational climate. Community college presidents needed to work with various stakeholder groups each with different and sometimes competing goals (Thomas & Beckel, 2007). Never before had the need to find common ground in higher education been more prevalent (Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Snowe, 2013).

Jacobsen (2000) wrote that common ground thinking was key during times of conflict because it offers solutions by allowing individuals to face issues head on. To be

successful, leaders must provide all those involved with a framework from which to work. Common ground thinking is not when individuals all agree, nor is it when they find a win-win solution; it works because individuals learn to live and work together despite their differences (Jacobsen, 2000). The theoretical framework needed for common ground thinking and those strategies leaders utilized to transform conflict are outlined within this study.

### **Six Domains of Conflict Transformation Behaviors**

In 2012, Larick and White (personal communication, September 12, 2012) identified the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground, which were acknowledged as specific behaviors used by leaders in transforming conflict to create breakthrough results. Because of this interest in these six domains of conflict transformation, coupled with little research regarding common ground and its relevance to other leadership positions, a collaborative effort was made between the faculty researchers and student peer-researchers to attempt to discover and describe these behaviors.

Transformational leaders who established common ground and produced breakthrough results relied on elements related to the six domains of conflict (Horowitz, 2007; Jacobsen, 1999; Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Snowe, 2013; Tan & Manca, 2013). The six domains identified in this study were collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and processes. The following sections further describe each of the six domains, including indicators of exemplar leaders in higher education who utilized the domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

## **Collaboration**

Collaboration is the ability to involve others in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner that allows for the achievement of agreed upon goals (Hansen, 2013). Collaboration skills were an essential element present with quality leadership (Astin & Astin, 2000), and transformational leaders relied heavily on strong collaboration skills. This sentiment was reiterated by Taylor, Rosenbach, and Rosenbach (2008) who reported that collaboration and cooperation were necessary to lead a team and was vital to accomplishing the task at hand. Iberra and Hansen (2011) further suggested that effective leaders developed a collaborative mindset that created an environment of teamwork and community that fostered mutual support. Hansen (2013) also identified specific behaviors exhibited by collaborative leaders, such as redefining success as bigger goals, involving others, and being accountable, which were traits that aligned well with the qualities of transformational leaders.

Collaboration was also a key component to establishing common ground (Clark & Brennan, 1991). Effective collaboration created a level of mutual agreement between individuals because it increased understanding and showcased areas of shared interests, which led to common ground (Clark & Brennan, 1991; Olson & Olson, 2000). Transformational leaders also resolved conflict and found common ground by being direct and building consensus through collaboration (Zanjani, 2012).

Community colleges are expected to serve the needs of their local communities, and their presidents are often called upon to facilitate collaboration between the college and the community. Successful community college presidents regularly collaborated with various stakeholders and were often brought in to moderate for individuals or groups

when there was a difference in goals, visions, and agendas (Hansen, 2013). Failure to manage these types of conflicts could undermine presidents' abilities to lead and ultimately result in their premature departure from the college (Tekniepe, 2014). Failure to manage the conflict was attributed to a number of different factors, including a lack of training on how to transform conflict, an inability to collaborate, and the inability to find common ground during conflict (Zanjani, 2012).

### **Communication**

Communication allows for the transferring of information and meaning from the sender to the receiver (Daft, 2012; Maxwell, 2010). The communication process has five basic steps: (1) the formation of the idea, (2) the message of the sender, (3) transmission, (4) the receiver receives the message, and (5) feedback (Schramm, 1954).

Communication allows humans to be understood, heard, and relate to each other in some way (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004). Communication is an essential human need.

As individuals enter the workforce, developing proper communication skills becomes necessary. Those with well-developed communication skills tended to be more successful and better able to work through conflict because they mastered the skill of listening (Guffey & Loewy, 2012). Listening was one of the most important parts of the communication process, and active listening involved focusing on the speaker, keeping an open mind, maintaining eye contact, empathizing, and providing feedback (Guffey & Loewy, 2012; Schilling, 2012).

Proper communication is necessary for finding common ground and resolving conflict. For example, Duignan (2012) noted that leaders must be honest and transparent in their communications and keep everyone informed while working to resolve conflict.



Effective communication skills were also important among community college presidents. Exemplar leaders shape the culture by communicating their core values; understanding the importance of observing traditions and how they support the school; celebrating the accomplishments of the faculty, staff, and community; and preserving the focus of the students (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Additionally, a study focused on community college presidents found they identified communication as a vital and important skill deemed necessary to be effective in the job (Tekniepe, 2014).

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Van Rooy and Viswesvaran 2004 noted that that emotional intelligence “enables a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own and others’ emotions in order to guide thinking and action that successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures” (p. 72).

Although the literature did not specifically address emotional intelligence in transforming conflict, characteristics of emotional intelligence were aligned with the qualities needed for resolving conflict. Emotional intelligence was useful for understanding the individuals’ feelings, building social awareness, and managing relationships (Hellriegel & Slocum Jr, 2009), which would be beneficial in working toward resolving conflict. Salovey and Mayer (1990) noted five domains of emotional intelligence (self-awareness, managing emotions, motivating oneself, empathy, and handling relationships) that involved the ability to perceive accurately, appraise and express emotions, access and generate feelings, understand emotions, and the ability to regulate those emotions to promote growth. Although Salovey and Mayer (1990) did not

relate their theory to conflict, the abilities they highlighted aligned with skills needed to find common ground and resolve conflict.

Emotional intelligence also plays an important role in the community colleges. Goleman (1995) noted “the higher the rank of a person, the more emotionally intelligent capabilities showed up as the reason for his or her effectiveness” (p. 94). Evidence also indicated that leaders with higher emotional intelligence had a greater impact and were more effective within their organizations (Murray & Kishur, 2008). Tekniepe’s (2014) study of community college presidents found high levels of emotional intelligence among the presidents and noted that many of these leaders specifically sought out education and training in this area to be more successful or prepared for the job. In another study, community college president data revealed that most presidents scored in the average ranges of emotional intelligence, they understood the concepts of emotional intelligence and used them daily, and they believed that emotional intelligence was needed for effective leadership (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). The community college president would benefit from high emotional intelligence in being able to manage relationships with the Board of Trustees, community leaders, and the college faculty, staff, and students.

Community college leaders who dealt with conflict, which in most cases was on a daily basis, approached each situation openly and honestly, utilizing emotional intelligence (Slaff, 2011).

During times of conflict, it was imperative that the leaders had relationships with their followers that were based on kindness and respect (McCallum, 2013). Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2013) noted that a leader who was cognizant of their emotions and

feelings was better able to handle conflict, especially after they built a solid relationship with their followers.

## **Ethics**

An individual's ethical framework stemmed from their values, character, rearing, and faith, and was evident in their leadership style (Posner, Kouzes, & Schmidt, 1985). Nourthouse (2004) noted, "In any decision-making situation, ethical issues are either implicitly or explicitly involved. The choices that leaders make and how they respond in a given circumstance are informed and directed by their ethics" (p. 302).

Within the community college system, the head of the organization maintained responsibility for the ethical practices of the organization (Moriarty, 1992). College presidents set the tone and pace for their respective organizations, and must be open, honest, and fair in their work with the college and surrounding community. In a study of potential college presidents, all noted that to be exceptional leaders it was imperative to understand how to be and appear to be ethical, which were critical to being an exemplar president (Mangan, 2015). Davis (2003) took this a step further by comparing ethics and morality, noting that ethics were what people should do in a given situation and morality was what people actually did.

Mueller's (2008) research was centered on the ethical situations of community college presidents, and the blurry lines between ethical and unethical behavior. His research explained that to resolve conflict, leaders must appear ethical. By comparison, community college presidents must make moral judgments and decisions daily, so it is important to understand the ethics and morality that they bring to the table, especially when it comes to how people under their leadership view them.

## **Problem-Solving**

Problem-solving was similar to “process” in that it had many different definitions, all of which were highly dependent on the context and circumstances associated with it. In terms of problem-solving and academic leadership, Buller (2013), noted that administrators adopt three distinct perspectives they should adapt during their tenure (a) problem-solving, (b) developing and promoting a vision of the future, and (c) helping people make their dreams come true. From this theory, problem-solving, when working through conflict, proves to be useful when dealing with material, financial, or physical obstacles have to be overcome, especially when there are emotions and feelings are involved.

Another theorist, VanLehn (1996), asserted that the problem-solving model had a lot to do with understanding the problem first, then solving problem. To work through this process took communication and collaboration (Roueche et al., 2014).

Through the literature review, the theorists indicated that an effective leader strove to solve problems through a process of communication and collaboration. An exemplary leader solved problems through common ground, which was especially important in the case of a community college presidents who were authentic in their leadership (Duignan, 2009).

## **Processes**

When examining community college presidents and the domain processes, it was important to view processes in terms of how they played an important part in leadership. Duignan (2009) indicated that educational leaders required processes, especially in terms of ethical decision-making given the political climate in which they worked.

Community colleges face a multitude of changes resulting from shifting demographics, budget cuts, and new legislative requirements. One of the most important processes used by exemplar community college presidents, as defined by Roueche et al. (2014), is the change process. Their research stemmed from a deep understanding that the change process involved motivating people to change by influencing their values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Roueche et al., 2014), especially when it dealt with creating a vision for the future of the organization.

**The change process.** When leading the change process, an exemplar leader understands that not everyone will want the change to occur and there will be fear and anxieties that may cause conflict (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010). Duigan (2012) noted that during the change process, leaders must be caring, understanding, and have a plan for guiding and communicating the change process to everyone. Important characteristics for leading change included being open, honest, collaborative, and transparent (Duigan, 2012), which were consistent with the characteristics of exemplar leaders (Roueche et al, 2014).

During the change process, it is the leader's responsibility to ensure that everyone is a change agent (Fullan, 1999). Fullan (1999) noted that not all individuals will agree with the change, but allowing individuals to be more involved in the process gave them ownership that typically resulted in positive changes. However, conflict may still be present and the leader must observe, note any conflicts, and address conflicts for positive outcomes. It is important to note that the conflict can have a positive impact on all those involved in the change process. Fullan (1999) suggested that "you often learn more from people who disagree with you than you do from people who agree" (p. 23), and that

“working through the discomfort of each other’s presence, learning from dissonance, and forging new more complex agreements” (p. 23) were positive outcomes of conflict and change.

### **Conflict**

For the purposes of this background information, conflict was defined by the peer-research team as: any cognitive (perceptual), emotional (feeling), and behavioral (action) dimension that differs from another cognitive (perceptual), emotional (feeling), and/or behavioral (action) dimension. This difference can be individual or collective.

Conflict can have different meanings and characteristics. Robbins (1974) defined conflict as an interaction between individuals when one attempts to block the intentions or goals of another. Daft (2014) noted that conflict was neither positive nor negative, and typically occurred because of scarce resources, goal conflicts, or power and status differences. Daft (2014) also supported the notion that effective leaders worked toward balancing conflict on a daily basis.

Conflict has been around for thousands of years and has been studied, examined, and criticized. Conflict will not be going away, so learning to deal with and resolve conflict is an essential characteristic for successful leaders (Duignan, 2012). According to Lederach (2003), conflict served as a motivational tool to inspire, or when used incorrectly, it divided individuals.

To better understand the nature of conflict, and how successful community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results, conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation must be examined.

Carmichael and Malguez (1996) noted that when managed correctly, conflict provided clarification. However, when not well-managed, conflict quickly escalated to finger pointing and arguing, resentment and destructive speech, and creating an us-vs-them work environment (Carmichael & Malguez, 1996). Those disruptive work environments included individuals who campaigned for people to join forces and pick a side, which was disruptive to the organization; managing those types of conflicts was vital to the success of the organization (Kouzes et al., 2012).

Conflict, controversy, and confrontation allowed individuals to create new solutions to problems, especially when individuals had a chance to collaborate with each other (Astin & Astin, 2000). Collaboration was one element that made conflict more manageable because it allowed individuals to work together toward a common effort or purpose and to achieve something greater (Hodkinson et al., 2007). Collaboration was found to facilitate constructive, positive conflict, but only when it was led by someone regarded as respectful, ethical, and focused on moving the group toward common ground (Pettitt & Ayers, 2002). Facilitating conflict in this way takes strong communication skills and comes from individuals with a high level of emotional intelligence (Hansen, 2013). The literature indicated that individuals who properly managed conflict possessed strong social skills, were more open, appeared ethical, and remained emotionally detached from the situation (Kouzes et al., 2012).

A study conducted by Umashankar and Charitra (2014) concluded that conflict, when not resolved, caused a loss in productivity and deteriorated relationships among coworkers. Their study observed individuals who took part in an intervention program that focused on emotional intelligence and empathy to see if it would reduce the

frequency of conflict. Their work found that that when it came to resolving conflict, those who were educated on the concepts of emotional intelligence were highly successful. Leaders were more likely to collaborate and communicate to resolve the conflict (Umashankar & Charitra, 2014).

Nearly all teams, especially high-functioning performance teams, such as those in higher education, experienced conflict. Conflict was viewed as a natural part of the process and a natural part of relationships (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Others found that conflict happened for a reason and brought about much needed change; during times of transformation, conflict was used constructively to change individuals and organizations into something better (Lederach, 2003). Therefore, to eliminate conflict would also eliminate its dynamic power. Many subpar leaders opted to eliminate conflict when possible because that was easier than accepting conflict for the positive changes it could bring (Odetunde, 2013). Within the college system, one role of the president is to manage conflict and control the chaos it brings (Tekniepe, 2014).

Conflict comes from many different avenues, such as anger, frustration, stress, power struggles, lack of or too much communication, or failing to handle problems in a timely manner (Duignan, 2012). Understanding the reasons behind conflict can be difficult to diagnose at times, especially for leaders who were not connected emotionally to the organization (Zanjani, 2012). Research conducted on exemplary leaders highlighted the importance of understanding and examining the sources of conflict, which helped them to better manage and use the conflict for change (Römer, Rispens, Giebels, & Euwema, 2012). No matter what caused the conflict, successful leaders understood that walking away from conflict was not a viable solution (Lederach, 2003).



According to Lederach (2003), conflict transformation allowed a leader to focus on the different aspects of conflict. This included dealing with conflict immediately, understanding that it was acceptable when no quick solution to conflict was found, and focusing on the human relationships of those individuals involved.

### **Community Colleges**

Community colleges serve multiple missions such as workforce development training, remediating students in preparation for higher education, and supporting/enriching the local community (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2015). As publically funded institutions, they get most of their funding from three sources: local property taxes, state allocations, and student tuition and fees, all of which require the president to report the status of the institution to a number of stakeholders (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013).

Community colleges have long been known as an alternative to four-year universities, especially for individuals who were either not fully prepared academically or financially. Reed (2014) wrote about how these local institutions offered an alternative for those who did not want to spend a lot of money on their education. Reed (2014) generalized that community colleges were considered to be outside the academic prestige of higher education, but serve a specific purpose to people in different ways. Both President Bush and Obama mentioned community colleges by name in their State of the Union addresses calling them job-training centers for workers displaced by automation and globalization (Reed, 2014). As these institutions are coming into the spotlight and enrollments are at an all-time highs, massive turnover in leadership is expected due to the retirement of baby boomers, with an estimated 75% of current presidents retiring within

the next decade (AACC, 2015; Reed, 2014). Additionally, vice presidents and provosts next in line to lead, were also populated with individuals coming into retirement age, which makes finding and developing the next generation of leaders all the more important.

### **History of the Community College Presidency**

To understand the history of the presidency at a community college, it was vital to examine the work conducted by researcher Sullivan (2001). Her work was based on the framework developed by Bolman and Deal (1991), in which they examined the leadership styles of four groups/generations of community college presidents. Although this work was centered around the leadership styles of community college presidents, it was still important to understand the history of the office, which makes both works relevant for this study.

Sullivan (2001) conducted research on the first generations of community college leaderships, in which she noted that the first community college was called, the people's college, which is now commonly called the community college. Sullivan (2001), refers to the four generations as the founding fathers, good managers, collaborators, and the millennium generation (Sullivan, 2001). The founding fathers and good managers were similar in that they were typically white, married, in their late 50s, highly educated, and veterans from World War II or the Korean War. Sullivan (2001) noted that the majority of them felt as though education was a way to gain upward mobility. Both grew up in a type of environment where the majority of leadership was transactional, most adapted their leadership to be more collaborative and transformational (Sullivan, 2001).

Sullivan (2001) characterized the third generation of community college leaders as collaborators. The majority continued to be white males, although the number of women and people of color were increasingly appointed as presidents. These individuals often stepped into the leadership role more prepared than their predecessors, and sought out specific training and education to ensure successful performance when leading the organization (Sullivan, 2001).

The current generation of community college presidents, were similar to their predecessors, but with some key differences. Sullivan (2001) notes that they were subjected to greater public scrutiny because of the availability of the internet and social media (Sullivan, 2001). These millennium leaders were also more prepared to lead than their predecessors because of more advanced training and better preparation programs (Thompson, 2011). The current generation also tend to serve in multiple presidencies by moving from college to college and spending an average of five years in the position (Amey, Vanderlinden, & Brown, 2002). Lastly, the majority of these current presidents grew up in the middle class, represented a greater range of diversity, and in some cases they were the first in their family to obtain an education (Amey et al., 2002).

Leaders typically took one of three pathways to the presidency (Pope & Miller, 2005). The traditional path was through career advancement moving from faculty to dean or vice president, and then becoming the president. The second path was career transitions where individuals from outside of education entered the position, such as business leaders or politicians. The third pathway to the presidency was individuals who transitioned from the K-12 school system into higher education, such as district superintendents (Pope & Miller, 2005). The traditional route was most common,

especially as Hughes (2015) noted that the individuals who entered from the second and third pathways were often lacking in higher education governance and integrity.

Hughes' (2015) finding was supported by a study conducted by Amey et al. (2002); they compared presidents with and without experience in higher education and found those with prior experience in higher education were more prepared to lead because they possessed the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the higher education system (Amey et al., 2002). When hired, those individuals with prior higher education experience tended to be successful because they understood the shift needed to become exemplary community college leaders, including promoting harmony and balance within the organizations (Akiri, 2013). The exemplar leader worked to provide an environment with mutual respect, trust, and understanding, which were key components for working through conflict and enabled the president to work toward finding common ground (Akiri, 2013).

Professionally, individuals who entered the presidency through the traditional pathway possessed doctorate or terminal degree (Duree, 2008), although fewer than 2% had a degree specifically in community college leadership or administration (Amey et al., 2002). McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebberts, (1999) found those individuals with advanced degrees in higher education or community college leadership indicated their degree directly contributed to their success as president.

### **The Role of the Community College President**

Community college presidents were hired by the Board of Trustees to serve as the chief executive officer for the college (Vaughan, 1986). The Board maintains legal and fiscal responsibility for the college, with the president overseeing the day-to-day

operations. The president's power was granted from and delegated by the board, so when the president made decisions for the college, it was on behalf of the Board of Trustees. Community college Boards were typically composed of ordinary citizens and thus relied on the president for the leadership of the college (Vaughan, 1986). Given the oversight structure of the Board, the president's relationship with the Board was critical.

The role of the community college president continues to become more difficult because of changing conditions and the need to do more with fewer resources. Community colleges leaders were now dealing with inadequate financial support, increased students costs, financial aid policy issues, challenges to remedial education, capacity challenges, challenges to their image, and problems with transferability (Bagadiong, 2014; Boggs, 2004). Specific to WA State, Beehler (1993) found community college presidents were also faced with a number of internal challenges in addition to external issues, such as over-reaching Trustees, presidents who were not trustworthy, and state board members and staff who were more concerned with external issues than the internal functioning of the college.

When examining current presidents, most were neither prepared nor formally trained to face tougher jobs than in earlier years of their tenure (March & Weiner, 2003). Additionally, as more presidents reach retirement age, there is a growing need to fully understand their role and how they overcame challenges and conflict to gain an enhanced appreciation of the influences placed on them, which will in turn benefit the next generation of leaders who step into executive administrator positions (Hay, 2006).

In a recent article, Katherine Mangan (2015) interviewed Miami Dade College president, Eduardo Padron, who provided insights into the role of the college president.

During his tenure, Padron mentored a number of educators who were considered the next generation of community college leaders. When he approached each of them about the possibility of moving up within their organization, all declined citing they did not want the position because of the pressures of the office. Most cited they felt ill-prepared to manage the conflict, which was a concept also supported by Bagadiong (2014) and Sullivan (2001).

Compounding the issues of recruiting future college presidents is the anticipated mass exodus of sitting presidents (who are baby boomers) as they begin to retire (Aspen Institute, 2013). Their replacements will be faced with declining resources, mounting pressures to provide access to a broad spectrum of students, trying to increase the number of graduates, growing demands to decrease tuition, and increasing requests to raise pay and improve services (Aspen Institute, 2013).

Eddy (2005) conducted a landmark study on the topic of college presidents' leadership styles. He concluded that although presidents were one of the most studied individuals when it came to administrators, little research had been conducted about how they constructed their leadership or how they worked through conflict during turbulent times (Eddy, 2005), both of which, according to the researcher, are vital for future leaders to be successful in their organization. The literature review clearly indicated a need for this study given the challenges facing sitting presidents and the next generation of leaders who will be stepping into the role of president.

### **Community College Presidents and how they Transform Conflict**

Conflict is a natural part of relationships (Bass & Avolio, 1993), and in the case of the president, it is vital part of their daily responsibilities. Lederach and Maiese (2003)

found that many people believe that conflict happens for a reason and that it brings much needed change. Therefore, to eliminate conflict would also be to eliminate conflict's dynamic power within the organization. In transformation, conflict is used to change individuals and organizations into something constructive, rather than something that needs to be eliminated altogether. Most subpar leaders would opt to eliminate conflict because it is the easy thing to do (Lederach & Maiese, 2003).

Community college presidents who are transformational in their leadership, exhibit charisma, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation, and have great potential to promote performance beyond expectations and affect enormous changes within individuals and organizations (Lederach & Maiese, 2003). According to the literature, each of these characteristics is key when transforming conflict within the organization.

A number of demands were put onto the shoulders of a sitting president. These internal pressures were centered around governing boards and issues between the faculty union and administration, faculty and students, and the faculty and administrators (Tekniepe, 2014).

### **The Practices of Exemplary Leaders who Utilize the Six Domains**

Roueche et al. (2014), identified specific behaviors and traits of exemplary leaders. They have noted that leadership is not inherent. In fact, through their research, leadership, in particular, exemplary community college presidents possess an exemplary leadership that is developed, taught, and learned. Because community colleges are unique in that they are open door institutions, and serve a multitude of stakeholders requires leadership that is both innovative and motivational. Their study identified that

individuals who are exemplary within their prospective institutions, are deliberate in their actions, noting that exemplar leadership is not something that just happens. Other researchers, Kouzes and Posner (2010a) noted that exemplar leaders were more focused on making a difference to achieve extraordinary results while facilitating the development of their followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2010a).

Although no specific studies that identified the six domains and how exemplar leaders used them to transform conflict were found, a few studies examined the domains individually. To understand how exemplar leaders use the six domains to transform conflict, there is a need to understand the characteristics of exemplar leaders. The work done by Kouzes and Posner (2010) was similar to this study because it directly identified practices of exemplar leaders. Although they did not mention the six domains per se, the themes were similar and directly related to this study because it described how leadership is a trust-based relationship from the lowest individual to the head of the company; their premise was that leadership is a measurable, learnable, and teachable set of behaviors. They are leading researchers in the field of exemplary leaders, focusing on the practices of leaders in non-profits, healthcare, and government, and they directly identified five specific practices of exemplary leadership: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (b) challenge the process, (c) enable others to act, and (d) encourage the heart. Within each of the five practices, Kouzes and Posner (2010a) also identified two commitments exemplary leaders must follow. The five practices and their two commitments are described further in the following sections.

**Model the way.** By comparison, this category of leadership aligned with the ethics domain in that leaders who were ethical in their actions were modeling the positive



attributes they wanted to see in their staff (Singer, 2011). Kouzes and Posner (2010a) noted that exemplar leaders who model the way do so in the way that they tell stories, how they spend their time, they also build commitment with followers by building and communicating a shared vision. The two commitments of significance that were identified as:

1. Clarify the values by finding your voice and affirming shared ideals.
2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

Exemplary leaders know and understand that their followers are constantly observing them, which in turns allows them to earn the respect of those around them. On a daily basis, these exemplar leaders set the example based on how they acted, how they managed their time, and how they talked (Kouzes & Posner, 2010a).

**Inspire a shared vision.** Although inspiring others toward a shared vision was not one of the six domains, it indirectly aligned with the domains communication and collaboration in terms of how the shared vision was communicated to the followers. A clearly communicated shared vision kept the organization on task and focused on the future (Roueche et al., 2014). Additionally, inspiring a shared vision indirectly related to the collaboration domain as transformational leaders often set the vision and culture collaboratively (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

According to Kouzes and Posner (2010a), this practice set the exemplary leader apart from ordinary leaders in that they engaged others in connecting their personal dreams to the group creating a shared vision, thus allowing their followers to commit their time, energy, and talents so that all can achieve greatness. The two commitments classified under this category were:

1. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities
2. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations

Kouzes and Posner (2010a) asserted that exemplar leaders had willing followers, and through their charisma, enthusiasm, and passion for making a difference, they created a vision for the future that motivated followers to want to succeed.

**Challenge the process.** Exemplar leaders are exceptional leaders who are great learners, who take risks by challenging the status quo by taking the initiative and searching for innovative and creative ways for getting the job done. More importantly, they treat failures as a positive inevitable part of doing business (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). The two commitments classified under this category were:

1. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve
2. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience

Kouzes and Posner (2010a) noted that exemplary leaders were often ahead of the game in terms of taking initiative, innovating and creating, and rejecting the status quo. They understood mistakes were an important part of the learning process and vital for success; mistakes meant looking for ways to improve, which made exemplary leaders successful because they were risk-takers.

By comparison, this category of effective leaders directly aligned with the processes domain. The processes domain requires the leader to be strategic, think through the systems, engage in the change process, and establish step-by-step procedures as needed (Sanderson, 2011) which directly relates to the domain of problem-solving.

**Enable others to act.** Kouzes and Posner (2010a) identified that exemplar leaders understood they alone cannot run the college by themselves. In fact, they built trust and relationships by involving key individuals in decision making, goals setting, thus empowering followers. In terms of enabling others to act and the domain, communication and collaboration, are the same in that a leader cannot be a leader without followers (Roueche et al., 2014). Exemplar leaders make followers feel as though they are important to the decision making process, which is one of the six domains of this study. The two commitments classified under this category were:

1. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships
2. Strengthening others by increasing self-determination and developing competence

Having an understanding of how exemplar leaders build professional relationships is essential, particularly when examining how they manage conflict (Goff, 2003). The successful leader, utilizes emotional intelligence, and fosters an environment where there is trust and supportive relationships (McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008).

**Encourage the heart.** Kouzes and Posner (2010a) did an excellent job of identifying when leaders who were striving for excellence, especially during times of major change, inspired others by giving them courage and providing hope. It is also important to note that their work was in line with this study in terms of how exemplar leaders are extremely effective in getting their followers to understand the work they perform matters to the organization. The two commitments classified under this category were:

1. Recognize contribution by showing appreciation for individual excellence.

2. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

One of the key traits of leaders who encourage the heart, are known for being open and honest, which is related to the domains of emotional intelligent, ethics, and communication. Encouraging the heart is a process that is key in resolving conflict and enables the exemplar leader to find common ground (Goff, 2003).

Kouzes and Posner's (2010b) research was closely related to this study in that if leaders who engaged in the five categories of effective leadership and associated commitments were more effective, particularly when engaging in conflict transformation, these leaders, when engaged in these practices, were exemplary in their behaviors. Exemplary leaders who were perceived as credible and ethical were more effective when working toward resolving conflict. The leadership behaviors and commitments also enabled exemplary leaders to manage the daily demands of the job, motivate their teams, and demonstrate their own loyalty and dedication to the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2010b).

### **Comparing the Six Domains and Leadership Styles**

To understand which leadership style is needed to transform conflict utilizing the six domains, an examination of transformational, transactional, servant leadership, skills and traits, leaders can display any or all each of these at various times and to various degrees, but effective leaders are described as displaying transformational leadership behaviors and transactional leadership behaviors more frequently (Avolio, 1999).

After examining theories of leadership and finding numerous variations, Roueche et al. (2014) defined leadership specifically for the community colleges as "Leadership is the ability to influence, shape, and embed values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors

consistent with increased commitment to the unique mission of the community college” (p. 406).

The six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground provide a framework for describing some of the common characteristics and activities of exemplary leaders. Research has shown that leaders who work in conjunction with these behavioral domains utilize a multitude of leadership style Roueche et al. (2014). Leadership styles, are characterized by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958) as a set of styles and how a leader uses them are all contingent on the situation, which aligned with Blanchard & Hersey (1997) theory on Situational Leadership.

Leadership styles tend to dictate how presidents resolve conflict and work toward finding common ground. Some of the more common leadership style theories are transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership. To understand which leadership style was best for transforming conflict, an examination of transformational, transactional, and servant leadership was necessary. However, it should be noted that leaders can display any or all these leadership styles at various times and to various degrees (Avolio, 1999). The following sections provide greater detail about transactional, transformational, and servant leadership.

### **Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership is a management style with a clear leader and follower relationship. The leader commands the individuals under their supervision by offering rewards for compliance and punishment for failure (Bass & Avolio, 1993). McGregor and Burns (1978) noted that transactional leaders relied on exchanging rewards from their

followers and in return the followers provided loyalty. Transactional leaders managed their followers by recognizing and understanding what the followers needed or desired, and then fulfilled those needs in exchange for meeting certain goals or duties (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). It was noted that the early generation of community college presidents often used this transactional leadership style, which mirrored their counterparts in private industry during the same timeframe (Eddy, 2005; Sullivan, 2001).

Transactional leadership has both benefits and drawbacks. Current literature supported the fact that to survive, a leader needs to use incentives to motivate and inspire their followers, which aligned with the rewards notion of the transactional leadership style (Deichmann & Stam, 2015). However, by today's standards the transactional leadership style was considered primitive, ineffective, inefficient, and not a viable option when trying to align the organization to be competitive in the rapidly changing academic climate (Deichmann & Stam, 2015).

In the current community college system, few transactional leaders remain. Presidents who preferred the transactional leadership style tended to have short tenures and were often removed by the Board of Trustees (Deichmann & Stam, 2015). Basham (2010) concluded that transactional leadership by itself was not feasible in higher education because it lacked the (a) formation of a clear vision and purpose with values, (b) establishment of an environment that promoted excellence and inspired trust, and (c) opportunity for change found vital for the growth of the organization (Basham, 2010). In contrast, successful leaders were found to hold strong values, established trust, functioned as a change agent, and set a clear vision for the organization.

Daft (2014) noted that transactional leaders worked through competition rather than collaboration or cooperation. The transactional leadership style by itself was detrimental to the viability of the organization because of the lack of feedback, trust, and communication between the leader and the organization. This leadership style also offered few problem-solving opportunities for those who wanted to contribute (McMahon, 2010). These limitations of the transactional leadership style highlighted how little the style aligned with the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground demonstrated by exemplary leaders.

In some situations, transactional leadership is a needed as a tool. However, community college presidents need to be more collaborative in their leadership of the organization, especially when dealing with the future of the organization. In the ideal situation, a leader must be able to draw on more than leadership style to be successful, (Basham, 2010), just as they use behaviors across all six domains of transformational leadership.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership was defined as the ability to lead an organization through significant change by providing vision and strategy that helps to reshape the culture (Daft, 2014). In comparison to transactional leaders who focus on the day-to-day operations of the organization, a transformational leaders looks at the bigger picture and aligns the people with the organization to be more successful by motivating the team toward performance (Basham, 2010).

Transformational leaders focus on team building, motivating, inspiring, communicating, and collaborating, which align with the six behavioral domains. Kouses and Posner (2002) suggested a pattern of behavior among transformational leaders that included setting high standards, motivating the staff to meet those standards, and transforming the culture. Transformational leaders acted as mentors by encouraging learning, achievement, and individual development. They provided meaning, served as role models, provided challenges, evoked emotions, and fostered a climate of trust (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Community college presidents who were considered transformational in their leadership style exhibited charisma, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation (Lederach, 2003). Lederach (2003) also found they promoted performance beyond expectations to effect enormous changes within individuals and organizations, or in the terms of this study, they achieved breakthrough results.

### **Servant Leadership**

The terms servant and leader were words first joined together by Greenleaf and Spears (1998). Servant leadership was characterized as leadership with a strong ethical framework, integrity, humility, morality, empathy, and trustworthiness. The premise of servant leadership is that the leader is there to serve the follower (Greenleaf & Spears, 1998), essentially putting the team first before his or her own self-interests.

In terms of this study, the exemplar leaders, who utilize the domain, emotional intelligence (leading from the heart), and appeared ethical in their behavior, were closely related in that the servant leader was an individual characterized as someone who listens



and shows concern for others, sacrificing their time and energy to provide a synergistic work environment (Waterman, 2011). The implication here was that the individual who possessed these skills had a high sense of moral purpose and were highly valued within their organizations (Fullan, 2003).

### **Specific Skills and Traits of Leadership**

Not one leadership style emerged as the best or most effective, and strengths were found in each leadership style. Successful leaders displayed different styles at various times and to various degrees, and in some cases even displayed transformational and transactional leadership behaviors at the same time (Avolio, 2005). This balance of behaviors was also supported by Deichmann and Stam (2015) who noted that transformational and transactional leaders motivated individuals to commit to the leaders' vision for the organization and prompted them to want to support the leader.

Given the strengths and benefits of each leadership style, it was important to further examine the specific skills needed to lead, such as mediation skills, collaboration skills, and technology (Shults, 2001). Miller and Pope (2003) noted eight skills needed and valued by current community college presidents: (a) stress tolerance, (b) problem analysis, (c) personal motivation, (d) organizational ability, (e) written communication, (f) educational values, (g) oral communication skills, and (h) judgment.

Other researchers noted that it was important for presidents to be experts in leadership theory and practice (Brown et al., 2002). Boggs (2003) stressed the importance of having leaders project a sense of integrity and honesty, and having high ethical standards. Hockaday and Puyear (2000) noted the following traits as associated

with success: vision, integrity, confidence, courage, technical knowledge, ability to collaborate, persistence, good judgment, and a desire to lead.

This literature review attempted to examine the role of community college president, conflict, common ground, and the six domains, no studies were found that focused on how on community college presidents' transformed conflict within the six domains. Instead research focused on leadership styles that were needed to be successful, but no pieces of literature specifically outlined how leaders worked through conflict utilizing the six domains. Although a number of peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and research studies focused on the foundations of conflict, common ground, and the individual six domains, no studies were found that focused on how on community college presidents' transformed conflict within the six domains. Researchers such as Vaughn (1992), Roueche et al. (2014), and others, focused their research on leadership and those skills and traits needed to be successful.

### **Exemplar Leadership in Higher Education**

The culture within the organization is developed and shaped by its leader and the leadership they exude. In the case of a transformational community college president, who are exemplar in their leadership, have the ability to change the culture of the college and community, by understanding the boundaries by which they work within, and then by realigning the organization's culture with a vision (Tekniepe, 2014).

Martin Luther King Jr. is an example of an exemplary leader who understood boundaries and was able to provide a vision of what could be. He led millions of people and encouraged them to protest without violence. He was considered to be an authentic, transformational, and exemplar leader of his time. He articulated a vision, showed

courage, committed to the cause, led by example, and was both ethical and a master communicator (Johnson, 2007).

In higher education, the person responsible for the failure or success of a community college is the president, who must constantly work through conflict to find common ground with stakeholders, especially during turbulent times. A transformational, exemplar community college president needs an understanding of how to balance the needs of stakeholders, how to best prioritize challenges, where to seek new opportunities for the organization, and how to keep the institution on target toward accomplishing its goals and mission (Roueche et al., 2014).

Community college presidents need to be effective within their organizations. During their tenure as president, they were challenged leader based on honor, dignity, curiosity, candor, compassion, courage, excellence, and service (Bogue, 1994). Successful college presidents adapted to the ever-changing systems and processes of higher education (Basham, 2010). Their leadership was transparent, authentic, and transformational, so as to lead their organizations effectively, especially during times of conflict. The exemplar president was prepared for change and allowed for innovative, futuristic thinking in a collaborative environment (Rodriguez, 1999).

Throughout their tenure, community college presidents faced a myriad of difficult situations and decisions, most resulting of some sort of conflict (Pettitt & Ayers, 2002). Transformational leaders understood the importance of conflict, knowing that it could either motivate and inspire or derail the mission of the organization (Pettitt & Ayers, 2002). Among exemplar leaders, they resolved conflict for positive change and used conflict as a team-builder (Gillet-Karam, 1999). One theory for resolving conflict was

trying to find common ground among the conflicted stakeholder groups (Moody, 1978). Potts and Catledge (1996) noted that establishing common ground could be a long and lengthy process and temporary agreement was a step toward common ground.

In a study of 256 exemplary community college presidents, Roueche et al. (2014) identified specific attributes that were common to transformational leaders; those who worked with their followers so that each raised the other to higher levels thus motivating and inspiring each other. Roueche et al. (2014), identified specific behaviors and traits of exemplary leaders. They have noted that leadership is not inherent. In fact, through their research, leadership, in particular, exemplary community college presidents possess an exemplary leadership that is developed, taught, and learned. In their research, they based their study on the fact that community colleges are unique in that they are open door institutions, and serve a multitude of stakeholders requires leadership that is both innovative and motivational. They situated their study to identify leaders who demonstrated transformational characteristics, and who influenced and shaped values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors at their campuses. The leaders within their study were nominated because of their exemplary practices within their prospective institutions, are deliberate in their actions, noting that exemplar leadership is not something that just happens. Of particular relevance to this study was importance of communication when working through conflict because communication was one of the six domains of transformational leadership (Roueche et al., 2014). Good communication skills was necessary to be effective, share information, and build trust, and exemplar leaders understood communication involved respectful listening and meaningful dialogue with the individuals whom they interacted with on a daily basis (Duignan, 2012; Pettitt &

Ayers, 2002). Communication is one of the six domains, and one noted as important to successful educational leaders as they engaged with stakeholders. Communicating, no matter the size of the organization, is done to keep everyone informed, which helps to build strong relationships and strengthen partnerships which is a trait of exemplar leaders, and was noted in works by Duignan (2012) and Roueche (2014).

The studies and works reviewed for this study has overlooked important variables on how exemplar leaders work through conflict utilizing the six domains. Despite the overwhelming literature on community college presidents and how they construct their leadership, there was surprisingly little to no literature on how they find common ground and use the six domains of collaboration, communication, ethics, emotional intelligence, process and problem-solving to achieve breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict.

One recent study, Roueche et al. (2014), conducted on 235 exemplar community college presidents primarily focused on the behaviors and traits of exemplary leaders, noting that leadership was not intuitive, but instead a learned behavior. And those who have had specific education and training develop their leadership are more successful. While the Roueche et al. (2014) is similar this study will take it a step further and significantly add to the Roueche et al. (2014) study by examining the lived experiences of exemplar leaders as they work through conflict, adding scholarly research, and will help to improve how exemplar leaders improve conflict resolution by finding common ground.

### **Conclusions**

Given the challenges that they face, Day and Zaccaro (2004) noted a need to understand the leaders of community colleges and how they work through conflict. The role of the president is constantly changing, forcing them to respond rapidly to the needs

of the college and community. The literature within this review indicated that the role of president has evolved over generations to meet the needs of faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, community college presidents are in a position to mediate, resolve, and make final decisions during times of conflict.

The review of literature showed a significant gap of research on how these leaders work through conflict to achieve common ground. Although most of these individuals obtained advanced degrees focused on community college leadership and administration, existing studies focused on the traits needed or obstacles to overcome to be successful. No specific studies were found that identified how they constructed their leadership during times of conflict to achieve common ground. A synthesis matrix was created to visually display the research used in this study. It contains a matrix which outlines the various components of each study as it relates to this body of research (see Appendix A). A small amount of individual literature was found on common ground, the six domains (collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, process), community college presidents, and conflict. The lack of available research showed a significant gap on how these different domains are utilized by exemplar leaders in relation to finding common ground to achieve breakthrough.

Community colleges are affected by a number of issues and challenges that could derail a presidency, such as shrinking resources and student enrollments, faculty who are approaching retirement age, title nine compliance issues and campus aide diversity and inclusion initiatives. In addition, there is and a large number retirements of senior administrators, and individuals who are baby boomers, leaving a large gap of, there is a significant need for this study for those who will be stepping into this role.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Overview**

Chapter I gave an introduction to the study and background of the research. The chapter provided the central and sub research questions, the significance of the problem, definitions, and the organization of the study. In Chapter II, a review of literature focused on leadership, conflict transformation, and the six domains of common ground. It also highlighted gaps in the literature regarding community college presidents. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of exemplar community college presidents in establishing common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

This chapter presents the methodology utilized to conduct the research study. It reviews the purpose statement and research questions identified in Chapter I. The chapter then details the research design, population, sample, instrumentation, and data collection. The chapter presents information needed to replicate the study, and to further the understanding of the steps used by the research team to increase reliability and validity of the study (Creswell, 2013). This qualitative phenomenological study allowed the researcher to examine the lived experiences of participants in an attempt to locate a universal nature of their shared experiences and how they used the six domains of collaboration, communication, ethics, emotional intelligence, process, and problem-solving.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

## **Research Questions**

### **Central Question**

What are the lived experiences of successful community college presidents in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground?

### **Sub Questions**

1. Collaboration. How do successful community college presidents use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
2. Communication. How do successful community college presidents use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
3. Emotional intelligence. What aspects of emotional intelligence do successful community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
4. Ethics. How do successful community college presidents use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
5. Problem-solving. How do successful community college presidents use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
6. Processes. What processes do successful community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?



## **Research Design**

This phenomenological study explored and described how community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results using the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

### **Method**

The method selected for this thematic study was a qualitative phenomenological, oral history of life experiences. According to Todd, Nerlich, and McKeown (2004), qualitative research enables the researcher to find “a more natural contextual and holistic understanding of human beings in society” (p. 59). With this in mind, qualitative research methodology was the most appropriate for this study because it gave a voice to the participants in a way that quantitative methods could not (Creswell, 2007).

Specifically, qualitative research was described as:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the work visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3)

Using a qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of the individuals being studied (Corbin & Strauss, 1998).

### **Rationale**

According to Patton (2002) in *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, the phenomenological perspective was rooted in philosophy and the central question was regarding “the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this

phenomenon for this person or group of people” (p. 104). The peer research group determined the focal point of the thematic study was on the phenomena that existed amongst exemplar leaders in different fields, which likely had different cultures and environments. The phenomenological approach allowed each peer researcher to explore the phenomenon accounting for extraordinary success in transforming conflict to reach common ground in those different environments. After determining that qualitative methods were most appropriate for a study of this nature, the team was challenged with determining which qualitative approach was most appropriate for the study. Three approaches were identified as potential methods for this study.

First, the team evaluated and discussed the appropriateness of a phenomenological study, which Patton (2002) described as the sharing in common a focus on exploring how human beings made sense of experiences and transformed experience into consciousness. The goal of this study was to describe the lived experiences of the phenomenon of community college presidents who were exemplar leaders amongst their peers and describe their shared experiences. Before the phenomenological study was determined to be the appropriate study for this research, two additional qualitative approaches were considered, grounded theory and ethnography.

Next, the team evaluated and discussed the appropriateness of a grounded theory study. A grounded theory study was considered because it would explore how successful community college presidents utilized skills from the six domains of conflict transformational behaviors. Grounded theory is a research method that enables the researcher to develop a theory that offers an explanation about the main concern of the population of a substantive area and how that concern was resolved or processed (Patton,

2002). Grounded theory was not an appropriate methodology for this study because it focused on establishing a theory rather than describing a phenomenon.

Last, the team evaluated and discussed the appropriateness of an ethnographic study. This type of qualitative approach is a general way of thinking about conducting qualitative research. It describes, either explicitly or implicitly, the purpose of the qualitative research, the role of the researcher(s), the stages of research, and the method of data analysis (Patton, 2002). Ethnography has roots in anthropology and sociology in which the researcher would study groups of individuals to identify the shared patterns or behaviors over a period of time. An ethnographic study would not address the phenomenon that exists among exemplar leaders, so it was not selected for this research.

Phenomenology emerged as the most appropriate method because it has its roots based in philosophy and asks a foundational question, “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Exemplar leaders command respect by the behaviors they exhibit, how they use their time, how well they communicate, and how they model the way for their followers (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). The phenomenological approach could be applied to different groups of people in different environments and cultures, yet embraced the same constructs and six specific domains. As such, the team of peer researchers believed this was the most appropriate methodology to accomplish the goals of the research.

Another factor for considering a phenomenological study involved the limited data available to support any overarching theory about the emerging field of common ground, the six behavioral domains, or the specific uses of them by exemplary leaders.

Thus, by using a qualitative approach about the lived experiences of exemplar leaders in the different fields, a pattern or patterns may be found that could lead to a tentative hypothesis about these constructs.

As with any study, the researcher has the primary role of data collection. Researchers go into a study with a certain set of biases, paradigms, or a set of beliefs or assumptions about the individuals being studied (Creswell, 2013). As such, it is important to understand the background of the researcher to identify any potential bias he or she may bring. The researcher for this study was a tenured lead professor of organizational leadership at a community college in WA State, worked in higher education for over 14 years, and had 20 years of experience working and leading individuals while in the U.S. Navy. She has taught and is a subject matter expert on communication concepts, ethics, leadership, and facilitation techniques. She also spent two years studying transformational change and leadership in a doctoral program in organizational leadership.

### **Population**

According to the AACC (2014), 1,132 community colleges exist to serve the needs of the local communities within the United States. After discussion with the peer research group, the researcher choose to study community college presidents located in WA State, which has a total population of 34. Population, as described by McMillian and Schumacher (2010), was the “total group” of a study and the group of individuals from whom the study intended to generalize about or describe.

## **Target Population**

The total population, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reported, in 2014, that there are 1,132 Community Colleges (public, independent and tribal) within the United States. The target population or sampling frame is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample was selected (Creswell, 2007). This study described the shared lived experiences of community college presidents in the state of WA State and attempted to locate a universal nature of their shared experience by discussing what was experienced and how each of the presidents interviewed experienced it. The target population selected for this study was exemplary community college presidents in WA State, for which there are 34.

To be considered an exemplar leader for this study, the leader needed to display or demonstrate at least five of the following criteria:

1. Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders.
2. Evidence of breaking through conflict to achieve organizational success.
3. Five or more years of experience in the profession or field.
4. Written/published or presented at conferences or association meetings.
5. Recognized by their peers.
6. Membership in professional associations in their field such as the AACC.

## **Sample**

According to Patton (2002), the same characteristics of a population are present in a sample group, meaning that the sample should be a snapshot of the overall population of interest. A sample is defined as the “group of individuals from whom data are collected from within the target population” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129).

This is the group of participants in the study selected from the target population. Sampling can be conducted in a multitude of ways. Random sampling, systematic sampling, proportional sampling, cluster sampling, convenience sampling, purposeful sampling (also known as purposive sampling), and quota sampling are all methods of sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, convenience sampling and purposive sampling were both deliberated. Convenience sampling was considered because it is based on “being accessible or expedient,” while purposive sampling is based on “selecting subjects with certain criteria” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, pp. 137-138). Purposeful sampling was selected based on the certain criteria of the sample participants, and convenience sampling was also considered due to the proximity and accessibility to the researcher, the sample size for this study is 15.

### **Sample Selection Process**

The sampling process for this study was criterion sampling. By using study inclusion criteria, a list of exemplar community college presidents were identified. The process for identifying potential respondents for the study and communicating to those potential respondents are as follows.

After completion of the Brandman Institution Review Board (BUIRB), a meeting was scheduled with a community college president who met the criteria for the study and he was asked to nominate colleagues who were exemplar and meet the minimum criteria. He identified 33 community college presidents in WA State who met the minimum criteria. An introduction letter was sent to the 33 community college presidents notifying them that they were identified as a potential participant for the study, introducing the study, and requesting their commitment to be part of the study. Of the potential eligible

pool of community college presidents, the first of 15 who responded to the email request were selected to participate.

1. Prospects were first contacted via email through their official college email address. This initial email explained the purpose of the study, potential benefits, possible risks, and the anonymity associated with the study.
2. If a prospective participant chose to participate, the researcher was directed to contact the administrative assistant to schedule an appointment time, with each tentatively scheduled for up to 60 minutes.
3. A conformation email was sent by the presidents' college confirming the time, date, and place of the interview.

### **Instrumentation**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), validity of a study is often threatened by the instrumentation used in conducting the study. When conducting quantitative research, the instrument is valid if it measures what it is expected to measure, and Patton (2002) further suggested that the instrument should be administered in a standard manner and may be in the form of “test items, survey questions or other measuring tools” (p. 14). In qualitative research, both Patton (2002) and Creswell (2014) agreed the researcher was the key instrument. Creswell explained “Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants” (p. 185).

The application process for the BUIRB, examined two key instruments, the researcher and the research questions that focused on the six domains of conflict transformation.

## **Researcher as an Instrument of the Study**

Patton (2002) stated that the researcher is an instrument within a qualitative study and introduce personal biases and perceptions into the data collection and analysis procedures. The researcher for this study led scripted interviews, conducted observations, and examined artifacts of community college presidents, and the data collected were viewed and analyzed by the researcher, which created the potential for bias and misunderstanding (see Appendix B). Reed (2014) cited that there was always a potential limitation in qualitative studies because the researcher was an instrument of the study.

The researcher for this study held pre-conceived perceptions of higher education and the office of president based on personal experiences as a student, administrator, and faculty member. As such, the researcher discloses that she was an active member in organizations that supported the college mission, vision, and goals, and had one-on-one meetings with a current president on matters relating to diversity and inclusion on campus. Additionally, she was involved in the Social Justice Institute, which provided the opportunity to meet with and talk to a number of sitting community college presidents in WA State. Further, the researcher belonged to the following associations: union member with the Washington State education association, college council, president's council, and the military education task force, all of which were volunteer positions except for membership in the union where active dues were paid.

Working in higher education presented additional researcher bias and could be considered a limitation to the study. Those biases were based on associations and interactions with current sitting presidents in WA State, and shaped how the researcher



saw, viewed, and understood the data and its interpretation. To minimize the biases, structured interview protocols were used, interview training was received, study procedures were documented, and potential biases were disclosed.

### **Six Domains of Conflict Transformation**

A relationship between the scripted research questions and the literature review existed in that the goal of the research was to identify and describe how exemplar community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. The literature review revealed that independently, there was a great deal of research on conflict and the six domains of conflict transformation (collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problems-solving, and process); however, there was little empirical research on the use of the six domains and how they were used by exemplar leaders in the community college setting as they applied to finding common ground and producing breakthrough results to avoid or reduce conflict.

Once approval was received to conduct the research, participants were contacted and an interview schedule was determined, based primarily on the availability of the participants. Each participant was given the interview questions at the beginning of each session. Interviews were conducted at the place and time arranged at the convenience of the participants, either at their office on campus or off campus.

### **Validity**

As stated by Patton (2002), “One way to increase the credibility and legitimacy of qualitative inquiry among those who place priority on traditional scientific research criteria is to emphasize those criteria that have priority within that tradition” (p. 544).

One of the most important aspects of this study was the measuring instrument. Validity and reliability indicators were used to ensure the quality of the measuring instrument (Creswell, 2013). According to Patton (2002), validity ensured the instrument measured what it was supposed to measure. Done correctly, the researcher utilized an instrument administrated in an appropriate, standardized manner according to the prescribed procedures (Creswell, 2013). For qualitative studies, the researcher was the instrument, and as such, the credibility of the study and methods relied on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person conducting the research (Patton, 2002).

Scripted interview questions were developed by the thematic group to accommodate all of the peer researchers in the various fields of inquiry. The interview questions were guided by the study's research questions and the literature review. The goal of this research was to identify and describe how exemplar community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behavior. As such, the interview questions focused on conflict, common ground, and the six domains.

### **Criterion Validity**

Criterion or predictive validity establishes a measure that can be predicted to produce similar results (Patton, 2002). The thematic research team established a clear definition of exemplar leaders. It was determined by the group of peer researchers that exemplar leaders demonstrated the following:

- Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders.
- Evidence of resolving conflict to achieve organizational success.
- A minimum of five years of experience in the profession.

- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Recognition by their peers.
- Membership in professional associations in their field.

Each perspective participant was asked to complete a participant demographic survey (Appendix C) to establish that these criteria were met.

### **Content Validity**

Content validity was defined by Creswell (2014) as, “the items measure the content they were intended to measure” (p. 160), and was established through the construction of the participant interview questions by the thematic dissertation team. The scripted interview questions were developed by the thematic group to accommodate all the peer researchers in the various fields of inquiry. The questions were derived based on the literature review and designed to address the research questions. Interview questions and sub-questions were designed to establish patterns based upon the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and processes. An experienced, qualified researcher observed the field-testing of the interview questions and provided feedback. The observer was a director of a community college campus who worked in higher education for over 20 years and an experienced researcher, and was thus qualified to validate the content of the scripted questions.

### **Pilot Interview**

A pilot test interview was conducted prior to data collection to determine interview content validity. Members of the pilot test team included the researcher, a vice

president for academic affairs, and a subject matter expert in conducting qualitative research through interviews. The purpose for the panel of experts was to provide feedback and enhance the validity of the survey instrument, which included the researchers questioning techniques. Upon completion of pilot testing, an application for approval of the research protocol was submitted to BUIRB. With BUIRB approval, potential participants were contacted through introduction letters.

### **Reliability**

“Reliability is the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another” (Roberts, 2010, p. 150). The test for reliability is whether the same results would be yielded if the same measurements were taken at different points in time. In this study, the context and “a description and interpretation of a person’s social environment, or organization’s external context, is essential for overall understanding of what has been observed during fieldwork or said in an interview” (Patton, 2002, p. 59).

Cross-paradigmatic communication can result in difficulties because the same words may have different meanings. It cannot be assumed that reliability and validity have the same meaning in logical empiricism and phenomenology. Even among the three most frequently used phenomenological methods in nursing research, lack of consensus exists regarding the issues of reliability and validity. (Beck, 1994)

To support a holistic qualitative analysis, data were gathered on multiple aspects of the setting under study “to assemble a comprehensive and complete picture of the social dynamic of the particular situation or program” (Patton, 2002, pp. 59-60).

### **Internal Reliability of Data**

The goal of the triangulation is to test for the consistency of the information and provide internal reliability of the data. “Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods” (Patton, 2002, p. 247). This study used data triangulation to authenticate participant sample statements and as evidence of accomplishment of information provided from the sample participants.

“A common misunderstanding about triangulation is that the point is to demonstrate that different data sources or inquiry approaches yield essentially the same result. But the point is really to *test for* such consistency” (Patton, 2002, p. 248). Participants were able to review their transcripts to ensure the transcription was accurate. The strategy ensured that the interviewees felt comfortable with the accuracy of their statements and that there was no misrepresentation of any statements made by participants (Creswell, 2007).

### **Inter-coder Reliability**

Codes were crosschecked to test for inter-coder reliability. As Patton (2002) explained, “The second observer should be able to verify that (a) the categories make sense in view of the data which are available, and (b) the data have been appropriately arranged in the category system” (p. 466). Lombard, Synder-Duch, and Bracken (2004) explained, “It is widely acknowledged that inter-coder reliability is a critical component of content analysis, and that although it does not ensure validity, when it is not established properly, the data and interpretation of the data cannot be considered valid” (p. 2).

For this thematic study, another peer-researcher was selected to check the coding and interpretation to ensure accuracy of themes from the coding. This was completed by having the peer-researcher double-code 10% of the data obtained by the primary researcher with a goal of 90% agreement in coded data to be considered the best, and 80% agreement on the coded data to be acceptable. As Patton (2002) stated,

The data set should be reproducible by another competent judge...The second observer should be able to verify that (a) the categories make sense in view of the data which are available, and (b) the data have been appropriately arranged in the category system...The category system auditor may be called upon to test that the category system 'fits' the data and that the data have been properly 'fitted into' it. (Patton, 2002, p. 466)

### **Data Collection**

Creswell (2013) outlined that the data collection procedures should include steps that set boundaries about how to collect both structured and unstructured information through interviews, observations, and the review of artifacts, which also included the recording of the interview. Three types of data collection methods were used for this study (interviews, observations, and artifact review) that described how community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results in their institutions by assessing whether and how they utilized the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

The primary data collection was anecdotal data from scripted interview questions. Conversations with the participants were audio recorded with a recording device and notes were taken during the interviews. The audio recordings were transcribed into a

form compatible with data analysis software. The identities of the participants were kept confidential, and a unique identifying number was used to track each participant (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3). Direct quotes from the interviews were included in the study, but no identifying facts were included in those quotes.

### **Types of Data**

Three types of data collection methods were used for this study (interviews, observations, and artifact review) that described how community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results in their institutions by assessing whether and how they utilized the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains had on achieving common ground.

**Interviews.** The data obtained were qualitative, consisting of transcribed anecdotal interview responses to scripted questions that were designed to illicit responses to the following six research sub-questions:

1. How do exemplar community college presidents use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
2. How do exemplar community college presidents use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
3. What aspects of emotional intelligence do exemplar community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
4. How do exemplar community college presidents use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
5. How do exemplar community college presidents use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

6. What processes do exemplar community college presidents use processes to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

To obtain information regarding the six sub-questions, the participants were asked scripted questions developed by the thematic group to ensure consistency in questions asked. A phenomenological interview involves the use of open-ended questions guided by the research problem (Whitley & Crawford, 2005). Semi-structured interviews maintained consistency across participants (Ponterotto, 2005). Quantitative data collection techniques may use surveys to measure the strength of participants' perceptions; however, the purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions of participants rather than to measure them.

Interviews were transcribed using the procedures of phenomenological analysis. The specific steps used were:

1. Interviews were transcribed.
2. Expressions relevant to the experience were coded.
3. Patterns and themes were identified.
4. The meaning(s) of the statements were uncovered or specified in context.
5. Common categories, patterns, and themes were identified and deciphered.
6. Comprehensive thematic descriptions of the experiences were developed from the common categories, patterns, and themes (Moustakas, 1994a).

Adopting questions from prior research will probably not produce valid interview data; however, the examination of different alternatives is essential in interview script construction. Interview questions can focus on experiences or behaviors, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory perceptions, and the



individual's background or demographic information. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, pp. 356-357)

For this study, the scripted questions first asked about demographic information, including: (a) position, (b) years in position, (c) age, (d) sex, and (e) total number of years in field. The next portion of the scripted questions was left as one primary open-ended and then several open-ended questions for each category of information; this section obtained experiential data in the form of anecdotes. These questions were followed up with more specific structured questions to elicit further detail pertinent to the domain being investigated.

**Observations.** Additional data collection included observations as another source of evidence of the answers to the scripted questions. "To understand fully the complexity of many situations, direct participation and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method" (Patton, 2002, p. 23). Observations included videotaped public meetings, news conferences, and stakeholder group interactions such as task force meetings, working committees, or other interactions.

**Artifacts.** "Artifacts are tangible manifestations that describe people's experience, knowledge, actions, and values" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 361). Artifacts included meeting agendas, reports, newsletters, public news releases, public documents, staff bulletins, community meeting reports, vision and mission documents, values, norms, and purpose statements. Phenomenological researchers, "...consider it important to set aside pre-judgements regarding the phenomenon being investigated. This may be termed the 'Epoche process,' epoche being a Greek term meaning 'to refrain from judgement'" (Moustakas, 1994b).

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Creswell (2013) noted the importance of writing the methods section for how the qualitative research was conducted so as to educate the reader or future researchers about the intent of qualitative research. This included providing specific designs, the role the researcher played in the study, the types of data sources, the specific protocols used for recording the data, how data were analyzed, and the steps of analysis to show accuracy and validity of the data collected. The following sections detail the collection procedures for the interviews, observations, and artifacts.

**Interview data collection.** The interview process allows the respondent to describe his or her own lived experience, which includes thoughts, feelings, images, and memories (Patton, 2002). The questions were open-ended, and reviewed for relevance by experts in the field to ascertain whether they were valid questions.

Prior to the scheduled interview, each participant was provided with the interview questions to facilitate the process. It was requested that the interviews be held on campus, preferably at the president's office, and occurred based on the availability and preference of each participant. The interviews comprised of two parts. The first part provided a short overview of the purpose of the study, including reiterating the voluntary nature of participation and requesting their written consent to complete the interviews. The second part of the interview was asking the scripted questions as outlined in the protocol.

The scripted interview questions were developed by the thematic group to accommodate all the peer researchers in the various fields of inquiry. The questions were derived based on the literature review and designed to address the research questions.

The goal of this research was to discover and describe how successful community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation. As such, the interview protocol included individual items about conflict and the six domains (collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and processes).

On the day of the interview, the researcher met the respondent at his or her college campus. The time of the interview was selected to accommodate the busy schedule of the presidents. Before the interview began, key information was reviewed with the respondents, including the potential risks and benefits related to the research. The researcher also reinforced that participation was voluntary and that respondents could decline to answer a question or stop the interview at any time. The researcher also informed participants their names would be replaced by pseudonyms and that the identity of all respondents would be kept confidential. Additionally, the researcher ensured that the Informed Consent form (see Appendix D) was signed prior to the interview began and that participants received the Research Participant's Bill of Rights (see Appendix E).

The one-on-one interview with the participants took place in the president's office, which ensured they would be comfortable and relaxed. When feasible, participants were asked to sit on a couch or at a table rather than behind their desk. The desk can be a physical barrier and preclude the subject from freely speaking. Interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and consisted of structured and open-ended questions, with follow-up questions asked as needed. A copy of the interview protocol is provided in Appendix F.

All conversations with the participants were audio recorded with a recording device, and notes were taken by the interviewer. The audio recordings aided in the transcription of the interviews into a form compatible with data analysis software. The identities of the participants were kept confidential and a unique number was used to identify each participant rather than a name. Direct quotes from the interviews were included in the presentation of results to illustrate key findings, but no identifying information was included with those quotes.

Once the interview was finished, the researcher thanked the respondent for participating and informed him or her that the transcript for the interview would be sent through email for a final review for accuracy. Upon completion of the interviews, the following step-by-step procedures were used:

1. Interviews were transcribed.
2. Expressions relevant to the experience were coded.
3. Initial patterns and themes were identified and coded as needed.
4. The meaning or meanings of the statements, patterns, and themes were uncovered or specified in context.
5. From these meanings, common categories, patterns, and themes were identified and deciphered.
6. Comprehensive thematic descriptions of the experiences of the experiences were developed from the common categories, patterns, and themes (Moustakas, 1994).

Upon completion of the study, thank you letters were sent to all respondents regardless if they were selected for an interview. Upon degree conferral, a thank you

letter was sent to the participants that included information about how they could obtain a copy of the dissertation.

**Observation data collection.** According to Patton (2002), observations were the best way to witness a phenomenon so as to fully understand the complexity of a given situation. Observations allowed researchers to see first-hand how participants interacted with others and how they participated in daily activities. For the purposes of this study, participants who were involved in the study were observed during board meetings, public meetings, departmental meetings, board of trustee meetings, president cabinet meetings, college counsel, meetings with community groups, news conferences, stakeholder group interactions, task force meetings, working committees, or other various interactions with key stakeholders both in and outside of the organization. Observations of such public meetings provided a broader understanding of the participant and his or her working environment.

Direct observation occurs when the researcher is in or adjacent to the environment being studied, but not a participant in the environment itself (Patton, 2002). For this method, the surroundings as well as the interactions of people were viewed to confirm findings from interviews and as a way to gain a deeper understanding of the study setting (Salkind & Rainwater, 2003). The researcher attended the specific meeting or activity and remained as an observer only, not participating in any of the activities, discussions, practices, or events, and noted significant actions or information produced from those activities.

When possible, direct observations were conducted of council meetings, board meetings, and speaking engagements. Formal as well as informal requests were made to

participants to observe them in a variety of situations. On the day of the observation, the researcher met with the participants in a previously selected location that allowed for public observation. The time of the observation was based on the event the researcher was allowed to observe. For private events not open to the public, the observer reviewed key information with the participants before the observation began. This included potential risks related to the research as well as benefits for participating in the study. The researcher also reinforced the idea that participation was voluntary and that participants can stop the observation at any time. Also, the researcher informed the participants that names will be replaced by pseudonyms and that the identity of all participants will be kept anonymous. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the Informed Consent form and made sure the participants signed the form before the observation began.

Observations lasted the duration of the event and field notes were kept. Field notes from the observations captured key data such as the date, people involved (by role and not name), description of the setting or interactions, and other information relevant to the study. Any references to conflict, common ground, or the six behavioral domains were also recorded. Field notes were uploaded to Nvivo and coded using the same procedures described for the interview data.

**Artifact data collection.** McMillian and Schumacher (2010) wrote that an artifact was a tangible manifestation of the subject that would describe their experience, knowledge, particular actions they took, and values. Salkind and Rainwater (2003) explained physical artifacts as “objects or elements that are open for your interpretation” (p. 209). Examples of artifacts collected for this study were meeting agendas, campus

reports, campus newsletters, local news reports, mission and vision statements, purpose statements, and participants' personal and professional goals (which were public documents).

Artifacts were documented using a review log. The artifact review log documented the types of artifacts collected, noting important variables relevant to the study such as their relation to common ground, conflict, and the six domains. As public institutions, many of the artifacts were publicly available documents, such as newspapers and meeting minutes, and thus were collected from public archives. The artifact review log was analyzed for patterns and themes relevant to the study and provided additional context about the community colleges and their presidents.

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2013) noted that when analyzing data, the following rules should be applied and were adhered to for this study:

- Avoid siding with participants (going native).
- Avoid disclosing only positive results.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.
- Report multiple perspectives.
- Report contrary findings.
- Assign fictitious names or aliases; develop composite profiles of participants.

Interview, observation, and artifact review data were gathered and analyzed using Creswell's (2013) three-step process. First, the data were organized and prepared for analysis. This involved transcribing audio files into Microsoft Office software, conducting a quick scan of the data, and noting any commonalities and themes related to

the six domains and conflict. Second, the themes that emerged were categorized into codes as they related to the research topic; categories were grouped together into code families to note the commonalities. The third step was to code the data so as to expose the phenomenon that was present amongst the participants.

### **Data Coding Process**

The software Nvivo program was used to help code the data. Coding allows researchers to handle the analysis of data so that they can organize, analyze, and find insights in an unstructured manner (Creswell, 2014). The data collected through coding also allows the researcher to identify reoccurring themes, ideas, and tones that come through (Creswell, 2014). The researcher coded data from the interviews, observations, and artifacts using the codes and code families derived from the literature and initial scan of the data.

### **Analysis**

The coded data were analyzed to identify any emergent themes, patterns, or similarities within the responses of the research participants for each of the six domains of conflict. More specifically, the analysis process reviewed the codes for themes that emerge around: (a) common ground, (b) conflict, (c) breakthrough results, (d) collaboration, (e) communication, (f) emotional intelligence, (g) ethics, (h) process, and (i) problem-solving. In addition to these codes, any emergent themes were also identified and coded.

For the purposes of this study, the collection and presentation of the data were vital for showing the phenomenon that existed with exemplar community college presidents. As such, a modified Stevick-Colazzi-Keen method of analysis of



phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994) was used for this study. It involved the following:

- Removing any judgment when working with the participants
- Recording all relevant information
- Ensuring themes had meaning as they related to the study
- Clustering themes that were relevant to the study
- Synthesizing the themes into descriptions that related to the lived experiences

Coding provides the researcher with insights across the interviews, observations, and collected artifacts. The coded data were analyzed to determine if common themes and shared experiences existed among community college presidents in WA State regarding the six domains, conflict, and common ground.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are possible weaknesses that could present themselves in the study that are out of the researcher's control (Creswell, 2013). The limitations of the study are stated for the readers to determine for themselves the degree to which the limitations affect the study. Price and Murnan (2004) noted that the reputation of a study with other participants in different settings provided a more substantial basis for external validity of the original study findings. This thematic study was replicated with the same methodology used by peer researchers and thereby supporting the validity of the findings.

This phenomenological study was limited to 15 community college presidents in WA State, each were recommended by a peer. The individual who recommended each participant is highly regarded in higher education, recognized by peers as being a true

servant leader, and was recently recognized by the Association of College Trustees (ACT), as the Community College CEO of the Year. The findings of this study may not generalize to other states or to other community colleges presidents within the state.

### **Time**

In terms of time, an approval to proceed with data collection from BUIRB was needed, which was received in November. Data collection began immediately afterward and ran through the month of January. With this timeframe, campus closures were an issue, which included breaks for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years. Following Patton's (2002) recommendation conducting research should be based on availability of the participants. Given the timeframe of the study, it was possible some eligible presidents did not participate because campus closures or that some participants provided shortened or less descriptive interviews because of the timing.

### **Researcher as Instrument of Study**

Patton (2002) stated that researchers are an instrument within a qualitative study and they introduce personal biases and perceptions into the data collection and analysis procedures. The researcher for this study conducted scripted interviews, observations, and examination of artifacts of community college presidents, and the data collected were viewed and analyzed by the researcher, which has the potential for bias and misunderstanding. Reed (2014) cited that there was always a potential limitation in qualitative studies, where the researcher is an instrument of the study, because of potential lapses in memory and biases.

The researcher for this study held pre-conceived perceptions of higher education and the office of president based on her personal experiences as a student, administrator,

and faculty member. As such, the researcher discloses that she has been an active member in organizations that support the college mission, vision, and goals, and had one-on-one meetings with a current president on matters relating to diversity and inclusion on campus. Additionally, she was involved in the Social Justice Institute which provided the opportunity to meet with and talk to a number of sitting community college presidents in WA State. Further, the researcher belongs to the following associations: union member with the Washington State education association, college council, president's council, and the military education task force, all of which are volunteer positions except for membership in the union where active dues were paid.

Working in higher education presents additional researcher bias and could be considered a limitation of the study. Those biases were based on associations and interactions with current sitting presidents in WA State, and shaped how the researcher saw, viewed, and understood the data and its interpretation. To minimize the biases and memory lapses, structured interview protocols were used, which included the recording of the interview, interview training, documented study procedures, and disclosure of potential biases.

### **Sample Size**

WA State has 34 sitting community college presidents. The sample size for this phenomenological study was 15 and set by the thematic research team. It was possible the sample was not representative of the larger population and that the small sample size limited the researcher's ability to accurately capture the full range of themes that may be present among community college presidents.

## **Replication**

As a phenomenological study, the sample participants were limited in their experiences, history, time periods, perceptions, and other personal variables; however, this study may be replicable in structure. Even after replicating the study, the results would probably differ due to different perceptions, personal values, beliefs, and biases of the particular sample participants chosen for this study.

## **Geography**

According to netstate.com (2015),

Washington covers 71,303 square miles, making it the 18<sup>th</sup> largest state.

The state is 360 miles long and 240 miles wide. It is divided into six geographic land areas; the Olympic Mountains, the Coast Range, the Puget Sound Lowlands, the Cascade Mountains, the Columbia Plateau, and the Rocky Mountains. (The Geography of Washington section)

Geographically, WA State community colleges are broken into two regions, east and west. The overwhelming majority of the community colleges are located on the western part of the state (27), with the remaining (7) located on the eastern part of the state. The geography will not be an issue for the researcher because the majority of community colleges are within a 150 radius. It was still important to schedule meetings and observations prior to each site visit.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to inform the possible researcher of the qualitative phenomenological case study's methodology in detail so as to replicate the study. The intent of the study was to examine community college presidents and how

they transform conflict. The research questions that were designed for this study were developed through a thematic team discussion and focused on the lived experiences of the participants. As such, the data collection and analysis procedures were described and explained. In Chapter IV, the results of the findings from the study are presented.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lives of the participants to identify the themes and patterns of how exemplar community college presidents used the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact the domains had on achieving common ground. In this chapter, the purpose and research questions for this investigation are restated, along with a summary of the research methods, data collection procedures, population, sample and target sample, and demographic data. This is followed by a presentation and analysis of the data. A summary of the findings is offered at the end of the chapter.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how successful community college presidents establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

### **Research Questions**

The research was guided by one central question and six more detailed questions, one aligned with each of the six domains. The central question of the study was: what are the lived experiences of successful community college presidents in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors and the impact these domains have on achieving common ground? The six sub-questions were:

1. Collaboration. How do successful community college presidents use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

2. Communication. How do successful community college presidents use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
3. Emotional intelligence. What aspects of emotional intelligence do successful community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
4. Ethics. How do successful community college presidents use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
5. Problem-solving. How do successful community college presidents use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
6. Processes. What processes do successful community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

### **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This was a qualitative, phenomenological study, which utilized personal interviews with community college presidents in WA State. The primary data collection was from scripted interview questions, observations, and a review of artifacts.

There are currently 1108 community college presidents within the United States, which is reflective of the population of this study. For this study, a set of criterion were determined who exemplar presidents were (see Table 1). Once the target population of 34 community college presidents in the state of WA was identified, a sample of 15 were used for this study.

Table 1

*Qualifying Criteria for Exemplar Community College Presidents*

	Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders	Evidence of resolving conflict to achieve organizational success	A minimum of five years of experience in the profession	Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings	Recommended by a sitting president with over 20 years of experience and was a prior president and vice president of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges	Membership in professional associations in their field such as the AACCC
Respondent 1	X	X	X		X	X
Respondent 2	X	X	X	W	X	X
Respondent 3	X	X	X	P	X	X
Respondent 4	X	X	X	PL	X	X
Respondent 5	X	X	X	A	X	X
Respondent 6	X	X	X	PL	X	X
Respondent 7	X	X	X	A	X	X
Respondent 8	X	X	X	PL	X	X
Respondent 9	X	X	X	PL	X	X
Respondent 10	X	X	X	PL	X	X
Respondent 11	X	X	X	PR	X	X
Respondent 12	X	X	X	A	X	X
Respondent 13	X	X	X	A	X	X
Respondent 14	X	X	X	W	X	X
Respondent 15	X	X	X	A	X	X

*Note.* A = articles; P = papers; W = materials written; PL = published; PR = presented at conference or association meeting



The sample for this study was 15 community college presidents in WA State. Each participant was asked the same scripted questions for each of the six domains of collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and process. Follow-up questions were asked as needed based on the responses. All questions asked were from the Specific Script Questions. All interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording device, and field notes were taken by the researcher. The audio-recorded statements were then transcribed and coded for emergent themes.

Participants were observed during council meetings, board meetings, and speaking engagements. Each participant was observed, for a total of 15 observations, although in some cases the president was observed in one or more separate situations. The observation notes and recorded observations were then entered as a document and coded for emergent themes.

Supporting artifacts were obtained either directly from the participant or his/her representative, were freely available on the campus, or through internet searches for meeting agendas, reports, newsletters, press releases, public documents, vision and mission statements, professional goals, norms, and purpose statements. A total of 128 different artifacts were reviewed. These artifacts were entered as separate documents and coded for emergent themes.

The respondents for this study were identified from the target population of 34 community college presidents in WA State. A purposeful selection process was used to identify the sample for this study (Creswell, 2013). An introduction letter was sent to the 34 community college presidents, which provided a brief introduction to the study and asked them to complete a short survey about the criteria for the study. The results of that

survey were used to identify (1) presidents willing to participate in the study, and (2) presidents who met the inclusion criteria.

To be considered an exemplar leader, the community college presidents needed to display or demonstrate at least five of the following criteria:

- Evidence of successful relationships with stakeholders.
- Evidence of resolving conflict to achieve organizational success.
- A minimum of five years of experience in the profession.
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Recognition by their peers.
- Membership in professional associations in their field such as the AACC.

The sample was the group of participants in a study selected from the target population. The size of the sample population was predetermined to be 15 community college presidents. The sample size of 15 community college presidents provided more depth and breadth to the study than would be available with a smaller sample size.

### **Demographic Data of Participating Community College Presidents**

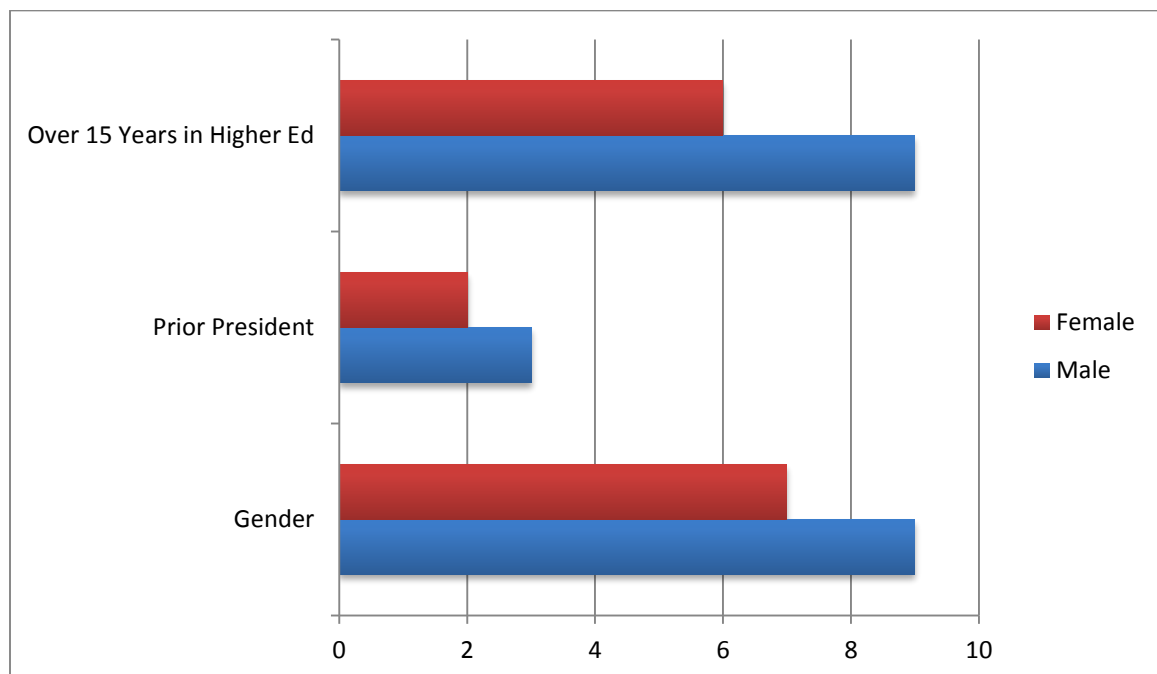
All participants met and exceeded the study criteria. Participants worked in higher education for an average of 15 years with a range from 15 to 35 years; none of the participants came from outside of higher education. The participants had written/published or presented at conferences or association meetings, such as the Higher Education Board in WA State, The White House summit on Community Colleges, and the Inside Higher Education newsletter. The participants were recognized by their peers with half of their colleges having been nominated for the Aspen award. Each participant

was an active member of the Washington Association of Community and Technical Colleges (WACTC), the professional organization of community and technical college presidents.

All participants, community college presidents, and their colleges were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Participant demographics of the study sample are as follows, out of the 15 participants, all were sitting presidents and 7 had previously held a presidency position. Their years of experience all exceeded 15 years. Additionally, 11 identified themselves as first generation college students and 13 possessed either a Ph.D. or Ed.D. All participants had previously held administrative positions in higher education, including faculty positions (Table 2).

Table 2

*Demographic Information of Respondents*



## **Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The findings presented in this chapter were derived using anecdotal accounts of lived experiences in response to scripted questions posed during personal interviews, and triangulation of those accounts with data from artifacts and observations. The findings in this chapter are reported based on the relationship to the central research question and research sub-questions.

### **Results for the Central Question**

The central research question for this study was: What are the lived experiences of exemplar community college presidents in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors? All participants were asked the same general interview question, with asked them to share about a time when they were faced with a conflict and they established common ground with stakeholders to break through the conflict. After conducting interviews with the 15 community college presidents, all reported having been involved in situations where they felt they established common ground and produced breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

All respondents noted that conflict was a natural part of their jobs, emerged daily, was campus wide, and occurred over things such as contract negotiations, office spaces, workplace behaviors, diversity issues, and budget cuts or increases. Some conflicts were between students and faculty, across faculty members, and between the faculty and administration. Conflict also arose because of campus-wide issues such as the lack of independent control of tuition rates, campus shootings (either on or off campus), hate

crimes (either on or off campus), an increase in the international student population/program, supports to military veterans, and responding to special needs.

Table 3 shows the type of conflict and a brief summary of the conflict topic as described by respondents.

Table 3

*Types of Conflicts Identified by Exemplar Community College Presidents*

Types of Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occurs during contract negotiations, and in the state of WA, negotiation discussions occur on a monthly basis.</li> <li>• Over office space, and around tenured faculty, adjuncts, and students.</li> <li>• Workplace negative behaviors between faculty, administrators, and support staff.</li> <li>• Diversity issues, inclusion, fair hiring practices, and having a diverse workforce.</li> <li>• Working through budget cuts or increases. There is a current request to cut the budget at each campus another 3%, which will have an impact on student services.</li> <li>• Student conflicts with instructors, grade appeals, and fairness.</li> <li>• Lack of independent control of tuition rates, which is controlled at the state level.</li> <li>• Campus shootings...providing a safe working environment, weapons on campus.</li> <li>• Hate crimes and proving a safe environment.</li> <li>• An increase in the international student program is causing a stress on student services, and finding qualified faculty to teach students who do not speak English.</li> <li>• Military veterans with PTSD. Proving a safe environment for these students to feel safe, including training/information for faculty, staff, and other students.</li> </ul>

Once all interviews were transcribed and coded, several overarching themes emerged about how community college presidents used the conflict transformation behaviors in an effort to find common ground. These overarching themes were not found to be additional themes, but incorporated the six domains of conflict transformation

behaviors collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and processes in ways that they could not be separated into their individual domains.

### **Major Behavior Themes**

The theoretical definition of common ground as provided by the peer-research team was an interplay of intentions of people from different sociocultural backgrounds, differences, and cultures while finding a foundation of common interest or comprehension (Horowitz, 2007; Jacobsen, 1999; Kecskes & Zhang, 2009; Moore, 2013; Snowe, 2013; Tan & Manca, 2013). The operational definition for common ground was defined by the peer research team as when all parties involved aspire to, and are willing to work toward, a new vision of the future together, one that meets everyone's deep-seated concerns and values (Search for Common Ground, n.d.).

After transcribing, coding, and analyzing the responses, four major predominant themes were identified by the respondents, which directly related to how they applied strategies while working to find or create common ground with stakeholders. In the course of the interviews, all of the respondents talked about using data to transform conflict, creating an environment for common ground, understanding the need for common ground, and facilitating common ground discussions. Table 4 presents the major themes along with example quotations for each theme, and is followed by a further discussion of each theme.

Table 4

*Overarching Common Ground Themes*

Major Themes	Example Quotations
Create an environment for common ground to occur. (n=45)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I believe that we all are growing. We want to grow in the same direction, and we all care about students, and we all care about the viability of our college, and we all care about figuring out solutions together. That's the common ground</li> </ul>
Understand the need to find common ground during conflict. (n=38)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting into a place where you can appreciate where a native student is coming from as a person who's not native is not easy and is incomplete even when you're trying really hard to do it because you're not that person and you can't own that experience that that person has had....What I come back to is civility, the common ground needs to be civil discourse because civil discourses because civil discourse both with the capital C and a small c is the bedrock of democracy.</li> </ul>
Successfully facilitate common ground discussions. (n = 31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Just totally trying to reach common ground and understanding of how we were going to move forward.</li> <li>Can we all agree that we value these things and if so, let's hold ourselves accountable for these things? Let's treat each other with respect. Let's have open and honest communication. Let's say what we mean and not dress it up, but respect one another when we do that. It might go a long way toward reaching some common ground in some of those really hard discussions.</li> </ul>

Note. n = number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

**Create the environment for common ground to occur.** All the presidents mentioned striving to create a campus environment that foster finding common ground. This was highlighted by one president who had opposing faculty who could not agree on anything. The usual methods to get them to work together were not working, so this president made the decision to send the entire team on a road trip to another college. It was a five-hour road trip and they spent three days together. The result:

*They came back and it was an epiphany. I asked a couple of faculty and they said “well, we had a great time. It was really good. We got some really cool ideas that we want to run at you.” I said okay. I said so, why the change? They said, “it wasn’t about visiting the college. It was about spending five hours in a car with somebody that you didn’t know”... One of the faculty members commented, “what we realized as we were talking about what we do and why what we do is important is that we have common values, we all want to see students succeed, we all want them to become what they want to become. We just have different viewpoints. Right, we just have these different disciplines, we have these different ways of understanding what it is we’re trying to do but at the heart we’re trying to do the same thing and so there’s common ground that we can build off of.” That was the light bulb moment for the faculty...because that group came back and said “yeah, we can make this work.*

The point was not to force individuals into a situation, but to remove the barriers that prevented them from seeing the common ground they shared. When asked where the idea for establishing common ground came from, the president said, *You learn that we all work for the college. We are here to serve the students, so you start with that, collect your data and go from there.*

**Understand the need to find common ground.** The need for finding common ground to work through conflict was echoed by all 15 respondents. Their sentiments were characterized by one president who shared:

*It’s easier to find common ground with people that you spend more time with, so yeah, in that way it is the executive team, but you can find common ground with*



*people outside, and with students, and with faculty, but you have to spend the time. That's the challenge with leadership.*

Each respondent noted that finding that common ground required open dialogue, honesty, intelligence, and a great deal of emotional intelligence. They also indicated finding common ground was easier when people got to know each other on a more personal level, which was why all the presidents said they enjoyed getting out and talking to students, finding out how they liked the college, and discussing what programs would they liked to see offered. When an issue arose, the respondents said they would take the time to listen, allow people to voice their thoughts, and then they would respond. During the observations, it was noted that when the presidents interacted with individuals, rather than taking notes or getting distracted, they just stayed in the moment and were always present.

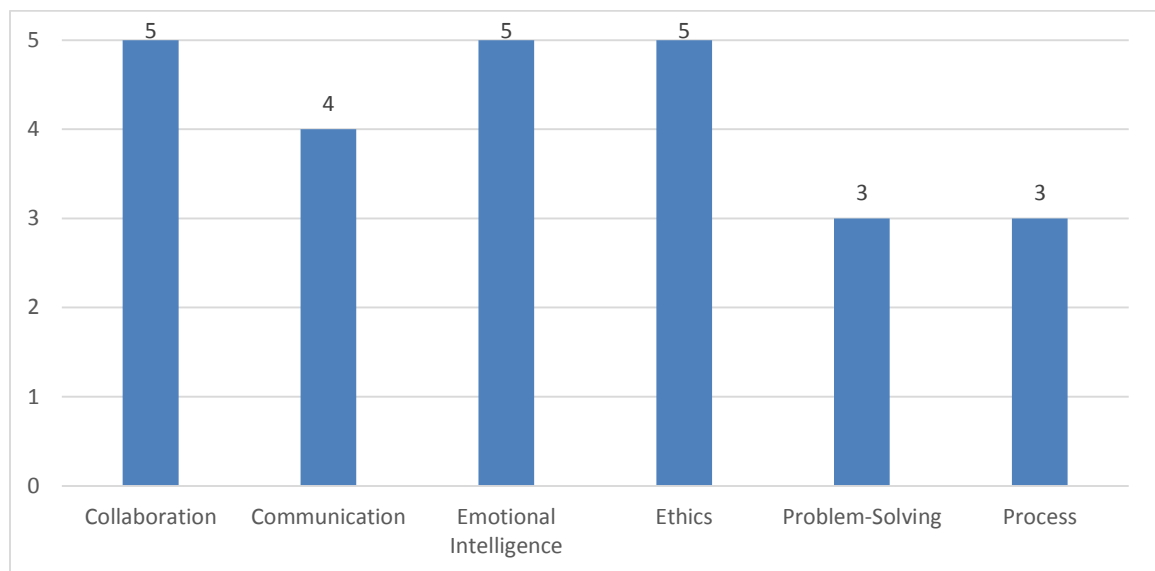
**Facilitate common ground discussions.** Facilitating common ground discussions was a skill mastered by these exemplar leaders. They knew and understood that creative conflict was a good thing. They also knew that destructive conflict could create polarization, which hampers the communication process and stifles collaboration. One respondent said, *When you can't collaborate, you can't find common ground.*

There was consensus among the group that avoiding a conflict situation was extremely destructive to the education process at the college, and if left unchecked, could derail a presidency. One respondent commented, *I think sometimes neglect of a conflict situation will lead to an escalation where the lid gets blown off it all of a sudden and then it's very difficult to deal with.* When asked about the resignation of the president and chancellor of the University of Missouri, all respondents commented, without knowing

the full scale of the situation, that it was clearly a missed opportunity where individuals were disconnected from conflict.

### Results for Sub-Questions

Themes emerged regarding the individual six domains of conflict transformation behaviors (collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and process) and how college presidents used the conflict transformation behaviors in an effort to find common ground. Within the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors, 25 themes emerged (see Figure 1).

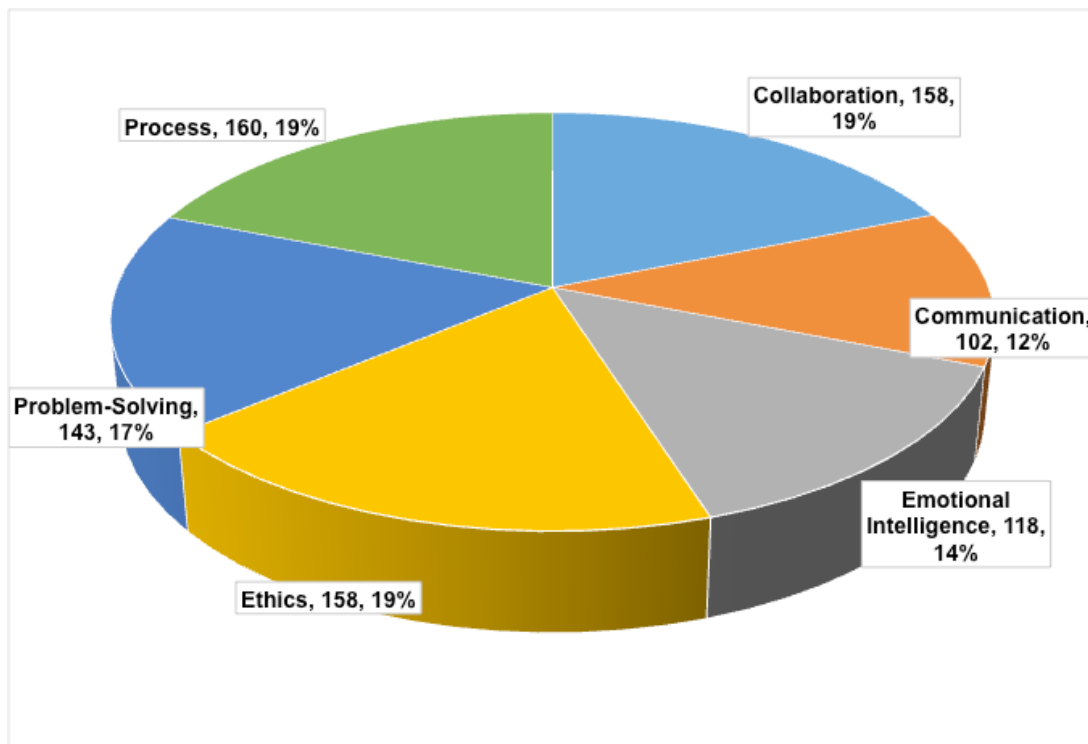


*Figure 1.* Number of major themes identified for each domain.

Collaboration, emotional intelligence and ethics, had the most identified themes (5 each), communication had 4 themes, and problem-solving and process had 3 themes each. In addition to the number of themes per domain, the number of references per domain was determined through the coding process; although, the quantity of themes and the number of references may not be proportional. As an example, the domains of collaboration, ethics, and emotional intelligence yielded the highest number of themes

identified in the above bar graph, but process yielded the highest number of references with 160 references, or 19% of the coded data regarding collaboration.

Of the six conflict transformation domains, process, collaboration, and ethics each represented 19% of the references, problem-solving represented 17%, emotional intelligence 14%, and communication had 12% of the total references (see Figure 2). The following sections present the major themes and findings specific to each of the six domains.



*Figure 2.* Number of references per domain.

### **Major Themes Related to Collaboration**

Collaboration was defined by the peer-research team as the ability to involve others, in a mutually beneficial and accountable manner, which allowed for achievement or acceptance of agreed upon goals (Hansen, 2009). Community colleges are expected to

serve the needs of their local communities and the college presidents typically lead the collaboration between the college and the community. Collaboration skills were identified as an essential element of quality leadership (Astin & Astin, 2000), and the community college presidents relied heavily on their strong collaboration skills.

The domain of collaboration was reported on by all 15 of the respondents. Additionally, a total of 107 references to collaboration were coded from the 158 data points, which included the 15 interview responses, 15 observations, and review of 26 artifacts. From the data collected, five themes emerged: collaborating with the executive team, collaborating with community leaders, collaborating with the board, fostering an environment for collaboration, and collaborating with peers. Table 5 presents the five themes, along with sample quotations related to each theme.

Table 5

*Community College Presidents use of Collaboration to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Quotations
Collaborating with peers. (n = 31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was a sub-committee that worked on the diversity commitment letter; they then brought it up for discussion at our meeting. As a group, we did some very minor wordsmithing on it. They had a shorter version and a longer version. The longer version maybe had three sentences more, so it wasn't extensively longer, but we thought the longer version gave a little more context to it, fuller, and we did very minor wordsmithing. ...In the end, all of us signed the diversity statement, and we agreed to share it with our individual campuses.</li> </ul>
Collaborating with executive teams on a regular basis. (n = 26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There's not a single one of us who just makes decisions and expects things to happen. We come together all the time, weekly, as an executive team, which are all the vice presidents. We take things out and we collaborate on a lot of things that will affect the college.</li> </ul>

*Note.* n = number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

(continue)

Table 5

*Community College Presidents use of Collaboration to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Quotations
Collaborating with the Board of Trustees to reduce conflict. (n = 18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We collaborate so that we can continue to be supportive of each other, especially during times of conflict.</li> <li>• I walk into our weekly meeting and they are working like a machine, they have the strategic plan up, they have the core indicators up, they have the operational plan up and they're checking off tasks.</li> <li>• How do I collaborate with the Board? By breaking bread. There's been a lot of interaction between the board and the president. Collaboration requires me to develop relationships. In September, we went on a retreat, and on one such retreat, a conversation was started that focused on being effective as a board. They started by asking some key questions...And we started and just let that be a working thing. Now, in January we have to kind of set it down. Again, there's been time for these relationships to be established.</li> </ul>
Fostering an environment where collaboration is paramount. (n = 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I believe strongly in collaboration across the board, as much as we can do that. I think system-wise, it's really important for us to do that, because then we're stronger when we can communicate in one voice to the legislature, to the general public, to the state board, who oversees all of this. If we're divided about things, then that's tough.</li> <li>• I think of collaboration as things that we do right here with employees on a day-to-day basis, and with the community in general.</li> </ul>

*Note.* n = number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

All respondents noted that collaboration was a critical part of the job of the president, which involved collaborating with the Board of Trustees, executive teams, and community leaders, to reduce the amount of, and number of incidents that .

**Collaborating with peers to reduce conflict.** An example of how these exemplar leaders use collaboration to resolve conflict, how they work with their peers. Peer collaboration is used by the 34 community college presidents in WA State, and where they meet on matters that could cause conflict on each of their campuses, such as

enrollment issues, budgets concerns, social justice initiatives, diversity and inclusion practices, they meet monthly to collaborate and work through conflict. The types of collaboration they utilized included peer-to-peer, formal, and informal, and provided environments that allowed them to network.

The monthly meets are part of WACTC, and all respondents are active members, which is the professional organization for community college presidents. This organization develops policy and makes recommendations to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). The WACTC acts on matters that are brought to the board, documents common issues, develops uniform procedures for member colleges, and works with the SBCTC and stakeholders. The artifact review revealed the board had an extensive history of discussing and acting on a number of issues, such as diversity, inclusion, and the increase in campus shootings and hate crimes.

This past year, these leaders identified that the tides were shifting regarding race relations, which was the cause of a number of conflict at a few campuses in the state. To get ahead of come of this conflict, all 34 community college presidents collaboratively worked together to draft a statement honoring diversity and establishing zero tolerance for an unsafe campus. The statement was drafted and signed by all 34 presidents, and each shared the letter with his or her campus along with a letter of explanation. Of the 15 study participants, only a few encountered pushback regarding the diversity statement, which caused conflict; when asked about the conflict, those respondents planned on holding a number of open forum discussions, brown bag lunches, and diversity activities. This is approach to handling conflict, reaching out and collaborating, was constant with all respondents.

**Collaborating with executive teams on a regular basis reduces conflict.**

Conflict is a constant presence on the campus, which at times requires the attention of the president. To manage, all respondents noted the importance of empowering their executive team to handle the majority of the work, which included navigating issues that involved conflict. The executive team typically consisted of the president and vice presidents (department heads), and they usually engaged in weekly closed-door meetings. The meetings were used to share information, discuss issues, strategize, and collaborate.

Respondents noted that collaboration with the executive team was typically on a weekly basis, which fostered an environment for collaboration and reduces the amount of conflict that typically occurs between the president and the executive team.

Collaboration required a willingness to meet together to talk through issues, which could be about a building project, a new program, social justice, or contract issues. The study participants noted that collaboration on a community college campus was needed, especially where conflict existed and collaboration was used to solve problems and other issues.

**Collaborating with local community leaders reduced conflict.** Three of the presidents interviewed discussed examples of having worked with local tribal communities. In one case, the president collaborated with local tribal leaders regarding a tribal community long house to be built on the campus. The collaboration required the heads of several tribes, some of whom had different perspectives and did not speak on a regular basis. Over the course of two years, the president was able to move all parties toward common ground, which helped to resolve conflicts.

The purpose of the community college is to support the local community, and if there is conflict between the college (canceling programs, building on tribal lands, protests), the president is the point of contact and the first person who is responsible for dealing with any issues the public would have. To reduce the conflict, the presidents regularly attended functions off campus and within the local community, spending a significant amount of hours and effort. The presidents reported collaborating with the local community leaders by reaching out to them to problem-solve, discussing potential partnerships, and finding ways to support the local community.

**Collaborating with the Board of Trustees on a regular basis to reduce conflict.** In the state of WA, the governor appoints trustee board members, and typically the any new member's identity is unveiled at their first monthly meeting. Board members are often composed of influential community members who reside within the college's community. These trustees are volunteers who serve a five-year term. Their service builds an important communication link between the college and the local community. When asked, 85% of the respondents noted their collaboration with the board required a willingness to meet together and talk through issues on a regular basis. They noted this was especially true when conflict arose as the collaborative relationships helped to solve problems.

All study respondents noted going to considerable lengths to establish good working relationships with their boards. To be effective, the presidents scheduled and attended regular board meetings on campus, with the meetings open to the public. In addition, the board and president engaged in retreats, which typically involved team-



building activities, to work on their relationships. This ensured they were able to collaborate on matters affecting the college.

All respondents noted they report to the Board of Trustees on all matters related to the college. As a result, establishing and building a cohesive relationship with the board was imperative. The presidents indicated their position required a willingness to meet and come together with the board members to talk through issues, which could include a multitude of topics.

The collaboration between the board and president was evident in 90% of the artifacts reviewed. During observations of open board meetings, they appeared to work collaboratively together on a number of issues. For example, at one meeting a building matter was discussed with concerns voiced by some community members who were present at the meeting; the board and president stayed the course and appeared unified in their discussions. When asked about this situation, the president noted that much collaborative work happened with the board prior to that meeting. A probing question was asked as to why the discussions were held prior to the meeting, and the respondent said, you never want to walk into a board meeting and not present a united voice; it sends the wrong message to the crowd.

**Fostering an environment where collaboration is paramount to reduce**

**conflict on campus.** Ibarra and Hansen (2011) suggested that effective leaders developed a collaborative mindset that created an environment of teamwork and community that fostered mutual support. All respondents understood the job of president required them to foster an environment where collaboration was paramount, and in all cases, it was the center piece of their job as president. They understood that collaboration

was a key way to motivate people to be more involved in policies, budgets, curriculum development, and matters around diversity and inclusion and significantly reduces the amount of conflict on the campus. An example of understanding that need to collaborate was given by one president who pushed to increase first-time student advising. The goal was to put opposing individuals in the same room, and then push them to understand that their work added value to the organization.

In the majority of cases (75%), the president highlighted their understanding of fostering a collaborative environment by stating the positives of collaboration. For example, one college president explained his/her understanding of the need for collaboration as:

*There are various levels of collaboration. The groups that you are working with dictate the type of collaboration. Collaboration comes in different forms. Of course, when I talk about working with my cabinet, I expect my cabinet members to act like a team, and to be a team. And inherent in the word team is collaboration. You can't work it alone. There is a distinct wanting desire and ability to work as a team member and to collaborate with one another. Collaboration with external stakeholders like community leaders and so-forth takes different forms. Sometimes it is just reaching out to them, talking about the potential partnership. Others maybe much stronger. For example, we have a collaboration with our college foundation and with external partners in the community who represent business or industry. And it is through this collaborative effort that we were able to build our programs.*

## **Major Themes Related to Communication**

Communication was defined by the peer research team as the transferring of meaning from sender to receiver, while overcoming noise and filters, so that the intended meaning was received by the intended recipient (Daft, 2012; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004; Maxwell, 2010; Schermerhorn et al., 2008; Stuart, 2012; Wyatt, 2014).

The communication domain was reported by all 15 of the respondents. A total of 102 references were coded out of the 158 sources, which included 15 interview responses, 15 observations and review of 26 artifacts. From those responses, observations and artifacts, four themes emerged. The first theme, understanding when to communicate as “the president”, was reported by all respondents. The second theme, communicating with the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students on a regular basis, was also a common thread discussed among all participants, and was evident in 80% of the artifacts. The next two themes directly related to the communication were reported on by over half of the respondents and were an indication how the presidents communicated with those around them. Table 6 presents an overview of the major themes with example quotations, and is followed by a more detailed discussion of each theme.

Table 6

*Community College Presidents use of Communication to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Quotations
Communicating with the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students on an individual basis (n=18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I like to communicate with small groups, one-on-one. I've always liked interviews. I hold regular office hours for the entire campus several times each term I really enjoy that.</li> <li>• It's different with every college, every campus, because the culture is different. The systems are different. What I mean by that is communication style, frequency, and method are variables in the communication equation.</li> </ul>
Being an active listener (n=17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have to learn how to be in the room with people and be with them as they're telling their story, giving them grace to tell as long as it takes.</li> <li>• I've learned that everybody comes with an issue from their perspective, and the information that they give you is true from where they sit. That is what makes listening so important.</li> <li>• Listening...just keeping the door open so people will really tell you what's on their minds.</li> </ul>
Building relationships through communication (n=11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can't develop relationships without communication. I would say that one of the tenants for presidents is to ensure that there is a communication channel that you have.</li> <li>• I decided that I'm going to spend time walking around the campus and talking to people...I'm just taking more opportunities to go around and visit people. For me, it's easy to get into my office, and get buried, and forget about what the real work is. That is the communication stuff.</li> </ul>

*Note:* n= number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

**Understanding when to communicate as “the president”.** When there is conflict, or during times of crisis, such as school shootings, presidents noted the importance of quickly sending out a message to the campus as a whole, letting everyone know the security measures in place, and addressing questions and concerns directly as the president. Having an open door policy was universal across all the respondents. All of the respondents noted that the role of president is just that, a role. Over half of the

respondents noted that it was important to know that when you communicate as the president, you speak for the entire college.

Ten of the respondents equated the job of president, in terms of communication, at that of a traffic cop; they were responsible for filtering and directing the flow of communications. Respondents noted that as the president, individuals tried to push them to get messages out quickly, especially where there was some sort of crisis, but as the president it was also their responsibility to ensure it was an accurate and appropriate message.

**Communicating with the local community, Board of Trustees, executive team, faculty, staff and students on a regular basis.** All respondents noted the importance of communicating with the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students often as a way to reduce conflict. Two behaviors noted as critical when communicating with any of the pillars were being an active listener and using communication for relationship building. In terms of communicating for relationship building, 47% of respondents noted that the most important tool they used was strictly informal and in-person communications. In this informal role, the presidents asked people about their families and what was happening in their lives. By getting to know them as individuals, it helped the presidents deal with other issues (e.g., conflict) because they shared a personal connection. The respondents reported that the environments of community college systems, compared to four-year institutions, were better designed for the more informal, day-to-day communications.

A number of respondents spent time walking around the campus, talking to people, and taking opportunities to go around and visit with the pillars. This strategy was

different for some respondents who noted they typically went directly to the office and got buried in the daily grind of work.

Nearly half (47%) of respondents noted the community college system was informal and individuals were highly likely to know each other on a personal level. As such, 53% of respondents discussed the importance of knowing the type of communication needed based on the situation and their role in that communication. An example given by one president was during a racial incident involving faculty and staff: *Despite a zero tolerance policy, the president worked to resolve the conflict through the department head), allowing them to handle the situation.* One president also noted that when a conflict involved individuals from outside the campus, often the state attorney general became involved and thus the president was required to step in to work through the conflict. One respondent shared, *From a communication standpoint, when you can put people in a situation like that where they can interact with each other, usually that's where good things happen.*

**Being an active listener.** A number of respondents (60%) highlighted the importance of active listening as a way to resolve conflict. *Solutions can be heard when you listen, if it is done correctly,* said one respondent. One tool used by a number of respondents was the hosting brown-bag lunch events. This allowed individuals to come eat their lunch and spend time with the president. One president stated that brown-bags were a great way to get out and meet with individuals up close and personal. Another a popular method used by respondents to hear concerns was one-on-one meetings with board members, members of the executive team, and union leaders, which were done monthly.

The presidents engaging in active listening was directly observed as well. Eight of the observations included viewing what was deemed *management by walking around*, which the presidents noted was a useful tool as to get the *pulse of the campus*. One respondent used this technique to talk to individuals directly, affording those individuals the opportunity to bring concerns directly to the president. The respondents noted that even when walking around or during informal conversations, it was necessary to be an active listener task.

One participant reflected about a racial incident that occurred on campus. The president needed to be proactive and have open discussions with the family, local community, the campus community, and the students, and the chief of police was invited to be part of the discussion with the family. As the respondent worked through these crucial conversations, it was apparent that his/her role needed to be that of the active listener. This allowed individuals to be heard and voice their concerns. Another example was shared by a respondent who noted:

*People feel strongly about things. When I was earlier in my career, I tended to listen to those who felt stronger and were more vocal about their perspectives. Now what I realize is that there are people who feel strongly about an issue, but they may not be as loud, or they may not have access to the decision-maker in the same way. So as a decision-maker, I have to make myself available to those people because they're not always going to be in my face the way a lot of folks are.*

This was an interesting aspect to the notion of being an active listener that was reflected through artifacts and observations. A number of the respondents were open

about the individuals who were always the loudest in the room. These respondents recognized that although the quiet person's concern was not the loudest, both will need to be heard. These exemplar presidents indicated it was important to allow all groups to have a voice, and it started with active listening.

**Building relationships through communication.** More than half of the respondents (53%) discussed the importance using communication to build relationships and reduce conflict. During the interviews, the presidents also noted tailoring the format of communication to the groups or situation, such as peer-to-peer interactions, speaking as the head of the college, or communicating as part of a group. The review of artifacts showed that the respondents participate in peer-to-peer monthly WACTC meetings with the other presidents, which was one way they built relationships and worked to find common ground and resolve conflict. WACTC is a highly structured organization made up of community college presidents in WA State. Their charge is to develop policy recommendations to the SBCT and to the community college system. While their membership with the WACTC is a required part of their job as president, collectively they forge a strong alliance so that they can communicate on major issues, concerns, problems and conflict that are confronted by the presidents.

There were a few notable strategies that the presidents engaged in to understand and reduce conflict. Some strategies were unique to only one president. For example, one respondent noted how he/she spent time in self-reflection, really thinking about how he/she interacted with people, who the individuals working on campus were as people, and how he/she needed positive relationships with them to get things done. Another president noted how he/she made a point of memorizing every faculty and staff member's



name. This president highlighted the benefit of knowing names by sharing a story about a committee meeting when some individuals were upset and the respondent was able to calm the situation by talking with them directly.

A common thread among all of the participants about working on relationships through communication was reflected through the following sentiment:

*I have semi-regular labor management meetings with both our faculty union, and with our classified union, and different kinds of issues to talk about with them. I have meetings, probably not as regularly as I ought to, but I try to meet with classified union group as a group about once a quarter. I try to meet with faculty less often than that, on a regular basis. But it is harder to get faculty together in a meeting. I communicate on a more informal basis too, by wandering around.*

### **Major Themes Related to Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence was defined by the peer research team as the self-awareness of one's own emotions and motivations, and the ability to understand the emotions of others in social settings, which allowed for management of behavior and relationships (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004). The domain emotional intelligence was discussed by all 15 of the respondents. A total of 118 references to emotional intelligence were coded out of 158 separate sources, which included 15 interview responses, 15 observations, and review of 26 artifacts.

All respondents noted they clearly understood how important it was to be emotionally intelligent. As part of the interview, each respondent was asked to provide their feelings about the resignation of the president and chancellor of the University of

Missouri college system. Each noted a clear disconnect and a lack of social and self-awareness by the chancellor, along with a failure to understand the emotions of others. This directly related to the top emotional intelligence themes noted by the respondents: self-awareness, understanding the emotions of others, social awareness, being guided by a set of principles, and setting clear boundaries. The respondents also related the value of emotional intelligence during times of conflict. Table 7 presents an overview of the major themes with example quotations, and is followed by a more detailed discussion of each theme.

Table 7

*Community College Presidents use of Emotional Intelligence to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Quotations
Self-awareness (n=31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You bring your full self, and that's why I said self-worth awareness is so important...I know I don't have the answers, but I know collectively there's not anything we can't solve together. I'm optimistic because I believe in people. That's a fundamental. I believe that we all are growing. We want to grow in the same direction, we all care about students, we all care about the viability of our college, and we all care about figuring out solutions together.</li> </ul>
Understanding the emotions of others (n – 27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It starts with being self-aware, knowing who you are, and then being willing to set all that aside, and listen.</li> <li>Have some empathy. Speak truth. Move on.</li> <li>I really was trained to have empathy, not sympathy, but empathy</li> <li>I was faculty and I started out as an adjunct instructor, so I started out as a part timer and then worked my way up through the systems. I get where faculty are coming from. I value where they come from.</li> </ul>
Social awareness (n = 18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You definitely need to know and understand the dynamics within the work groups that you work with. If you don't, then the work conflict becomes much tougher.</li> </ul>

Note. n = number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

(continue)

Table 7

*Community College Presidents use of Emotional Intelligence to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Quotations
Setting clear boundaries (n = 11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think the other thing about all of this is, it does take some thinking and some courage about where that line gets drawn, about who you will be, and who you won't be, and what you will do and what you won't do.</li> <li>• When I'm engaging in the conversation and I start to feel a little uncomfortable, I make it pretty clear that I need to just be in my space right now... That's the hard part of being a leader at the college - everyone wants to know your opinion on every single thing. Sometimes, one, I don't want to share it, and two, I don't need to.</li> </ul>

*Note.* n = number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

**Self-awareness.** All of the respondents expressed a keen awareness of who they were and what they represented. The review of artifacts showed that all respondents worked their way up through various positions at different colleges and had a keen understanding of the kinds and types of conflict within the higher education system. All respondents were also baby boomers who witnessed major cultural shifts in education, diversity, and funding. Also noted from the review of artifacts, 40% had written about their journey through the education system, which for several, included navigating the higher education system as a first generation college student.

One observation occurred during a faculty and staff of color conference, at which 40% of the study participants were in attendance. When asked why they attended, each responded said that they were aware of their presence and what it meant for the college and the employees who attend the conference.

**Understanding of the emotions of others.** Van Rooy and Viswesvaran (2004) noted that emotional intelligence “enables a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own and others’ emotions in order to guide thinking and action that successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures” (p. 72). All respondents noted the importance of identifying with others, specifically during conflict, so as to see the world from the other person’s point of view. In discussing the importance of understanding the emotions of others, nearly half of the respondents made comments similar to: The old notion of where you stand depends on where you sit. This affords the leader to gain a better insight as to the type conflict.

**Social awareness.** All respondents noted that building social awareness and managing relationships was beneficial in working toward resolving conflict. Respondents also reported that when working in groups, particularly during times of conflict, it was imperative to understand the dynamics within the workgroups. Additionally, some presidents noted they spent up to 90% of their time out of the office networking and talking individuals. It was through these incidents of peer-networking that all respondents added personal diversity statements to their institution’s website, which outlined their personal views regarding diversity and inclusion.

**Setting clear boundaries.** The culture within the organization is developed and shaped by its leaders and their leadership styles (Tekniepe, 2014). In the case of transformational community college president, who were considered exemplar in their leadership, all had the ability to change the culture of the college and community by understanding the boundaries in which they worked and then by realigning the organization’s culture with a new vision. It was clear that all respondents set clear

boundaries, particularly when it came to their personal lives and the position that they hold. This was highlighted by one respondent who noted:

*I think the other thing about all of this is it does take some thinking and some courage about where that line gets drawn, about who you will be, and who you won't be, and what you will do, and what you won't do.*

### **Major Themes Related to Ethics**

Ethics was defined by the peer research team as human beings making choices and conducting behavior in a morally responsible way, given the values and morals of the culture (Ciulla, 1995; Strike et al., 2005).

A total of 143 references to ethics were coded from the 158 data sources, which included 15 interview responses, 15 observations, and review of 26 artifacts. Five themes emerged: authentic leadership, integrity and honesty, strong values, leading with the heart, and trust. Table 8 presents the five themes, along with sample quotations related to each theme.

The artifacts reviewed for this study, in terms of ethics, indicated that all of the respondents regularly set the tone and pace for their respective organizations by being open, honest, and fair in their work with the college and surrounding community, which helped to reduce the amount of incidents related to conflict. This was also noticeable in the observations of respondents during board meetings and open forum discussions regarding campus safety. At one particular board meeting, there was discussion around the budget and potential budget cuts. There was a heated discussion between the president and members of the campus community. At one point, individuals accused the president of not being connected, and made comments about how the president does not

care about the cutting programs. This open discussion led to individuals repeatedly voicing their concerns to the president and Board of Trustees. During the break, the president took the time after the meeting to talk with the individuals. During another observation, the president used body language that was open, talked little, and called each individual by his or her name, which fostered common ground and seemed to ease the tension.

Table 8

*Community College Presidents use of Ethics to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Questions
Be an authentic Leader. (n = 96)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes I think the institutional folks think, shared governance means, I give you an idea on how to solve the problem, and you do it. No. That's not how it works. I think that is part of it. I think authenticity, for me as a leader, I probably get away with more crap than other people can get away with, because I'm authentic. If I make a mistake, I'm going to tell you I made a mistake, I am not afraid to own that.</li> </ul>
Integrity and honesty. (n = 30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think it is just about living with myself and my own internal gauge of what's okay and what's not okay.</li> <li>• You've got to wake up and live with yourself.</li> </ul>
Strong values. (n = 22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You have to look at yourself and your values... You have lots of options open as a leader. Sometimes it takes a risk; sometimes it takes bravery, being brave. At the end of the day, we all have to sit down and say 'can I live with myself and the decision that I made'. Those resonate with the values that I have as a person, and as a human being.</li> <li>• You're spending money on what you care about and so fundamentally, from a business perspective, when you look at other colleges, what do they spend their money on? That tells you what they value.</li> </ul>

*Note:* n= number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

(continue)

Table 8

*Community College Presidents use of Ethics to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Questions
Lead with the heart. (n=19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When I have to let go of somebody at the college, they can see that I care. It's not something I enjoy doing. I care about the person as a human being, and I think you can do that when you do a face to face on conflict. They can see that you really mean it, you're not just sort of blowing it all off, 'Sorry, I had to make this decision. We'll see you down the road,' and all. I think that face-to-face, again, reading how they're accepting it and when I see they're not accepting it well, I try to help them work through a tough decision.</li> </ul>
Be truthful. (n=18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On campus, there's so much conflict, and for whatever reason, if you've lost that trust, you've lost that ability to communicate effectively.</li> </ul>
Being guided by principles. (n=17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think when you have guiding principles, when you say, 'This is how we are going to be,' than the leader needs to fall on a sword every single time. If those principles aren't within the leader, then you're going to have an opportunity to fall on the sword every day with competing principles.</li> </ul>

*Note:* n= number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

The artifacts reviewed for this study, in terms of ethics, indicated that all of the respondents regularly set the tone and pace for their respective organizations by being open, honest, and fair in their work with the college and surrounding community, which helped to reduce the amount of incidents related to conflict. This was also noticeable in the observations of respondents during board meetings and open forum discussions regarding campus safety. At one particular board meeting, there was discussion around the budget and potential budget cuts. There was a heated discussion between the president and members of the campus community. At one point, individuals accused the president of not being connected, and made comments about how the president does not care about the cutting programs. This open discussion led to individuals repeatedly

voicing their concerns to the president and Board of Trustees. During the break, the president took the time after the meeting to talk with the individuals. During another observation, the president used body language that was open, talked little, and called each individual by his or her name, which fostered common ground and seemed to ease the tension.

**Be an authentic leader.** The exemplar community college presidents used ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by being authentic leaders. Authentic leadership is characterized by someone who builds honest relationships, remains positive and truthful, and follows principles (George, 2003). All 15 respondents were adamant about being true and authentic in their dealings with everyone with whom they came into contact. In one interview, the respondent said, *To be successful, you have to be authentic, and leaders are authentically moral people.* There was consensus that moral leaders had the interests of others in mind before themselves, and that being genuine and authentic with people was essential.

The observations found strong evidence that all respondents thrived when they were out of the office. Community college presidents in WA State had the unique ability to be out of their offices more than their counterparts at four-year universities, which enabled them to connect more on a personal level. All of the respondents had open door policies, and in one particular case, the president went to lunch with different employees. The presidents believed that such actions helped them be viewed as open and honest.

**Integrity and honesty.** The concept of integrity and honesty brought much passion during the interviews and was testament to who they are as leaders, and how they work through conflict. In one case, the respondent noted that, *if you are not willing to*



*fall on the sword over your principles, then you are not going to be able to lead appropriately.* This statement was followed by:

*You're better off saying, "I don't stand for anything and I don't have the principles," because then you can just do your stuff. But if you say, "We are going to treat people with respect, and act with integrity, and be open and honest, and be collaborative," then people know how to act, how to be, and what the expectations are.*

This and similar sentiments reflected the fact that all these presidents came up through the ranks, worked hard to make a name for themselves, and were now sitting in a position where they could lead the organization. One respondent commented about being publically ridiculed for a decision that was not well-liked; however, this individual was adamant about the rules, and because of that, this person weathered the storm by holding true to his/her principles.

**Strong values.** All of the respondents noted that conflict in the workplace was inevitable, which was verified in a number of articles, diversity statements, and other artifacts that were gathered. The presidents also reported that by having strong values, they were able to work through the conflict. One respondent shared:

*When you shy away from conflict, you actually don't get anything done because you can't be nice all the time or you can't be trying to avoid people who may disagree with you. If people know you, I think what happens is they assume good intent because they know who you are and what your values are, and they know what you care about.*

**Lead with the heart.** This statement summed up what was reflected in all of the interviews, observations, and artifacts:

*The job of president requires you to deal with conflict on a daily basis. So to come into this work you have to create a space for the work. It's not about you; you're a conduit. You are a catalyst to help people get their work done, to be able to see how their small piece fits into this big transformative work that is education. It's not one; it's a series. It's not done by impulse but a series of small things coming together, which is what Vincent Van Gogh said so well. It's a collection of small things coming together.*

These individuals worked long hours, were committed to working in the community, and attended local events, in addition to monthly Board of Trustee meetings and peer meetings with the other presidents. All of these meetings were off-the-clock and in addition to their normal work day. One respondent noted that it was about servant leadership and serving the college, noting that, if you do not have heart for that, then you are in the wrong job.

**Be truthful.** All of the respondents talked at length about their background, where they came from, and the importance of being seen as a truthful person. A prime example was a situation described by one respondent as being racially fueled, which was a conflict between differences of opinion. The respondent characterized the situation as:

*The race relations are just fierce. From folks feeling like, "Oh, you're favoring (sic) because you're (sic), and you're not doing enough for your own race." I can't tell you how many times I was called before my*

*community, saying you're not doing enough for them. Gosh, I had a huge blow-up with another minority community because they were like "you're treating us like we are the same, and you're not providing services to these other minorities that are low-income," so I had to work through that, and my god, that was a year of torture. Just totally trying to reach common ground and understanding of how we were going to move forward. Part of it was because I didn't know a lot of those folks, I had to establish those relationships and established trust.*

All respondents provided consistent information and were unified on one particular issue, any appearance of unethical behavior could disrupt the campus community and lead to the demise of a sitting president.

**Guided by principles.** The literature review shows that exemplary leaders utilized a set of principles and practices that allowed individuals to work through conflict creatively and promoted a peaceful co-existence (Gray, 1989). All the community college presidents interviewed noted having their own set of guiding principles. Some noted their principles stemmed from their parents or grandparents, and others stated they were guided by doing the right thing in a conflict situation, because it is the right thing to do. This theme was captured by one respondent who said:

*I think it's important for people to know who I am and where I'm coming from, and what I value and what I care about. Just because then they know, when I'm making decisions or when I'm doing things, where I'm coming from. It's always important to me that people know that I am a first-generation college student; I grew up on welfare, in a single parent*

*household, so when it comes to dealing with students like me, with similar backgrounds, I feel really strongly about that. Access and student success are at the heart of what I do.*

### **Major Themes Related to Problem-Solving**

Problem-solving was defined by the peer research team as the act of choosing and implementing a solution to an identified problem or situation (Harvey et al., 1997). The domain of problem-solving was referenced 143 times across the 158 sources, which included 15 interview responses, 15 observations, and review of 26 artifacts. Across the data, three themes emerged: commissioning teams to focus on solutions, soliciting input from the Board of Trustees, and encouraging problem-solving by the executive team. Table 9 presents example quotations from each theme, and is followed by a more detailed description of the themes.

Although all 15 respondents reported individual ways to problem solve, all focused on key elements that were centered on the college and its mission. One respondent offered the following description:

*I feel like we can problem-solve because we made a commitment and a promise to someone. When we take someone's money for their education, we make a promise to them. I think of that as the ethic. We also have an ethic of care and an ethic of stewardship, and so I believe we have to create a hospitable environment where people feel as though who they are is valued and they feel as though it's respected.*

Table 9

*Community College Presidents use of Problem-Solving to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Quotations
Commissioning a work group/team to focus on solutions (n = 27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whenever you can put people in a situation where they can interact with each other, usually that's where good things happen.</li> <li>• We have a group of people and we all have our own ideas ...Because we all have different styles of managing and leading, unless we all agree on what the intended outcome is, it is very difficult to get full collaboration.</li> </ul>
Soliciting input/advice (n = 20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It will be interesting to hear what comes out of the focus groups with the consultant about where issues are. There are always issues. I think if we try to set the framework that says this is what our goal is and it's a goal that is worthy, we are saying this is important to the institution.</li> <li>• I wanted to talk to all these people, so I went out and sat down and said, tell me what I need to know. I obviously don't have enough information, so tell me what I need to know about this.</li> </ul>
Encouraging the executive team to solve problems at their level (n = 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We had some issues with [this organization] about a contract. I think the worst contract we had. I could have jumped in, but it really was part of my VP of Finance's responsibility. I made him in charge, but at the same time, I was present at the meetings but remained invisible. I would coach him and strategize with him. He's a smart guy. A lot of it he figured out himself, but I felt that my job was to continue to frame for him my expectations, how we were going to get there.</li> </ul>

*Note:* n= number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

There was no evidence during the interviews, review of artifacts, or observations any that problem-solving was something that could be ignored. In fact, 90% of the respondents cited the recent issues at the University of Missouri as an example of leadership that failed to problem-solve.

All respondents indicated that if any potential for crisis existed, they were compelled to act immediately. In all the cases, the presidents notified their administrative team and sought their input to develop a plan to the challenge. When appropriate, the

presidents or their representatives informed faculty and staff of any immediate problem or issue. This prevented the rumor mill from spreading inaccurate and potentially inflammatory information. In most cases, the presidents expanded their normal circle of advisors by seeking advice from attorneys, other presidents, civic and community leaders, and other individuals who were able to provide insight into resolving the challenge.

**Commissioning a work group/team to focus on solutions.** VanLehn (1996) asserted that a problem-solving model had a lot to do with understanding the problem first, then solving problems. To work through this process took communication and collaboration (Roueche et al., 2014). For the study participants, the process of problem-solving centered around collecting data and aligned with the institutions' vision statement, student success, values, and equity. The respondents noted that data-driven problem-solving began by asking the right questions.

Respondents were unified in voice when discussing forming groups to solve problems. In one particular situation, a president experienced significant push-back on an initiative, so the president formed a committee and charged them with collecting the data and working through the problem. This type of delegation was consistent in the review of artifacts and throughout the interviews. The common themes were not doing the job alone, trusting the processes, and communicate the vision. It was this conversation that a work group of faculty was commissioned looking into this for the president.

**Soliciting input/advice.** All respondents noted the importance of communicating with stakeholders on all matters related to conflict, and soliciting their input/advice on how to resolve the conflict. There was a consensus in terms of needing transparency, getting out of their offices to talk with faculty and students, and making themselves

available, either by having an open door policy, holding formal office hours, or hosting open forums. One respondent said, *Being visible on campus is very important.*

Visibility, according to 80% of respondents, allowed them to be known on campus, meet with people, get their input, and help them to understand decisions that may affect them. Soliciting input and gather information (e.g., collecting data) was of paramount importance to the presidents. One president equated soliciting input with gaining perspectives, noting:

*First of all, I got all the information and read the reports, like who do they serve. Then I met with the [group] to listen to their perspective on what the issues are, and I am a data person... Asking the staff to provide me with detailed information about what the issues are, and then listening to people. Then I'll go out and meet with an organizer to hear their perspective.*

**Encouraging the executive team to solve problems at their level.** The executive teams typically consisted of senior level administrators, who were usually the vice presidents of the college. According to 90% of respondents, weekly meetings were held to discuss issues and problem-solve. At this level, the presidents spent considerable time ensuring conflict was dealt with in a timely manner. In addition, one respondent made the following statement, which characterized the team dynamic:

*If you have a problem, you come to me and tell me you got a problem. Come up with a solution, or two, or six. Be willing to engage in the solution finding with me. Don't just come and throw the problem at my*

*feet, and say I am the cause of it or somebody else is the cause of it. Come to me with some ideas about what we're going to do to fix the issue.*

All of the respondents were universal in their language regarding their executive team: they relied heavily on their expertise and experience. For example, based on the review of artifacts, 95% of respondents were off campus over 50% of the time in a given week, attending meetings, giving talks, presenting, or working with the local community. During these off-campus times, the executive team took responsibility for the campus, making decisions and resolving conflicts.

### **Major Themes Related to Processes**

Processes were defined by the peer research team as the methods that included a set of steps and activities that group members followed to perform tasks such as strategic planning or conflict resolution. Duignan (2009) indicated that educational leaders have a process in place to problem-solve.

The use of processes permeated the data with a total of 160 references across the 158 data sources, which included 15 interview responses, 15 observations and review of 26 artifacts. From those sources, three themes emerged related to collecting data, collaborating, and evaluating processes. Table 10 presents the three themes, along with sample quotations related to each theme.



Table 10

*Community College Presidents use of Processes to Establish Common Ground and Produce Breakthrough Results*

Major Themes	Example Quotations
Transform conflict by making data-driven decisions. (n = 161)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a president, you work with various constituencies and groups where decisions have to be made. I go in with the data and I go in with the values. I open with the facts. I really try to define the problem, then I stop talking and let other people work on that. Then I really try to listen to what everyone is saying and try to find that common thread. We can agree on that one thing, these other 15 things we can't, so let's agree on that and then get very systemic about how we bring these other 15 things to a green light.</li> </ul>
Ask questions and collect data. (n = 71)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One of the things that's important is really having your team talk about those issues ahead of time. With the things happening at Missouri, with things at Western and other places, we had a cabinet discussion several times of 'how's our tone? Is anybody hearing anything? Are you picking up anything from your staff? Have you picked up stuff from the faculty? What are the issues?' I think that's important to just know that you have to keep a sense on the barometer of what's happening on campus.</li> </ul>
Utilize process to collaborate with the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students. (n = 24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our President's Cabinet...It's sort of what I like to refer to as a Noah's Ark Committee. We have two of each kind that are represented, and everybody has the opportunity to bring concerns forward that they have about things that are going on and/or we discuss policies that we need to take through the process.</li> <li>In conflict situations, I've got folks on my leadership team who will say the exact opposite, which is good. I tend to be process oriented in those situations and I say, what do we need to do to make this happen and how do we work through the conflict.</li> </ul>
Evaluate processes for effectiveness. (n = 22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Just kind of see where they are...What we are setting up for in January is now, we have to finish where we had a retreat in September that said 'let's get a start at looking at how do we evaluate the president? What's the self-evaluation tool for the board? Is it effective? What are the goals going to be?'</li> </ul>

*Note:* n = number of references from 15 interviews, 15 observations, and 26 artifacts.

**Transform conflict by making data-driven decisions.** All respondents were adamant regarding the process they go through to resolve conflict, indicating that it all started with data. Each noted that data were powerful tools. You can use data to justify cutting program, adding staffing, funding new programs or buildings, and gaining buy-in. As one respondent said, *If you do not have the data to support your theories, than it doesn't matter how good or bad the program is, you will not get buy-in.*

When dealing with conflict, all of the respondents understood that not all data were numbers and that they must listen first so as to understand. All of the respondents believed that by listening to others perspectives on different issues, it allowed people to voice their issues and concerns. A respondent commented:

*By listening to their perspectives on what the issues are, and I am a data person so I really like to have data, so when people say 'Oh, it's just a big nuisance, and it costs us money.' I'm like, 'So how much money does it cost us, and what is it?' Asking the staff to provide me with detailed information about what the issues are, and then listening to people.*

There was a sense that this group relied heavily on the data, not to be dismissive, but to be decisive. However, a few also that said they did not rely 100% on the data, noting sometimes they strayed and went with a gut feeling, but only after communicating and collaborating with stakeholders such as the Board of Trustees and executive leadership team.

**Ask questions and collect data.** All of the respondents were unified in using data to reduce conflict. One respondent shared a story about a particular project the faculty wanted and union supported, but the administrators at the college did not want to

entertain the thought of the project and rejected the request. In an open forum, the president shared information, which included specific data points that supported the faculty position on the subject. In this case, the president did not pick sides, but instead presented the data, deployed a working group to research it further, and then came back to the table to discuss it. The process of collecting data was a centerpiece for resolving conflict, which was reported by all of the respondents.

Another commonality among the presidents was the importance of asking questions for clarification, such as whether an initiative aligned with the institution's vision statement, focused on student success, or aligned with the institution's values and equity statements. One respondent commented, *Questions need to be asked about how does that fit into the daily fabric of the institution, adding that the process should always involve asking questions.* Another respondent indicated that just asking questions was not sufficient and commented:

*Whenever you do run across conflict, you go back to your process to problem-solve this. Stop, talk to people so they know who you are and understand your compassion. Showing empathy is a must; you can't be so sanitized that you only ask questions.*

All respondents were asked about a recent situation where a University president closed the campus because of a racial situation. One respondent made the following statement, which was a sentiment shared by 90% of the presidents interviewed:

*What would I have done in that circumstance? I don't know all of the details, but I know that there were hate messages that were communicated, and that's a risk. You need to think about the whole, in his*

*case, the whole university, and everybody who was there, and that fact that you're putting people at risk by allowing things to continue. Then the other part is that you want to deal with the perpetrators in some way to try to reduce the risk and address the problem... With both situations, you have to ask questions, collect data, and get a message out, hopefully before a situation like this happens on any of our campuses.*

From the review of artifacts, it was noted that 80% of the respondents gave speeches on topics from shared governance, professional development, the state of the college, and incidents on campus. The speech transcripts showed the presidents went through a list of questions they asked and presented about how they resolved the problem or how they planned to resolve the problem. The presidents were succinct in their responses and walked through the step-by-step process of resolving the conflict, which typically involved data collection.

Utilize process to collaborate with the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students. The respondents universally mentioned that the process of collaboration was a way to solve problems or resolve conflict. In most cases, it involved councils made up of exempt and classified staff, with faculty from every division represented. Within the WA State community college system, most decisions go through these councils. This shared governance was identified as a collaborative process, with one respondent commenting:

*If we discuss something and we bring it to the council, your job then is to go out to your area and talk about it. You have to get feedback. If you*

*come back and there's part of the guidelines for the shared governance, it actually has a drop-dead date.*

Another respondent talked at length about how faculty played a part in the process of addressing issues and resolving conflicts, sharing:

*The other piece where the collaboration piece comes in, we have a phenomenal faculty. They are changing the world from my perspective. I get really emotional because they are just incredible. We put the data out, they looked at the data and they said, "Can we have the data down to the individual faculty and the individual section?" We had the ability to do that finally and we gave it to them. And they said "while we are not doing so well, we need to figure this out." The faculty said, "here is our answer, we are going to redesign our remedial algebra." They took it and ran with it. Instead of waiting, they took the initiative and worked through the data.*

All respondents noted the importance of putting people in situations where they could interact with each other, thus allowing them to work through the conflict.

**Evaluate processes for effectiveness.** All respondents noted that any process that is used to resolve conflict should be vetted at some point. There was consensus that the evaluation process was a validation process, an accumulation process, and it required individuals to ask tough questions. An example given repeatedly focused on the budget process. Every year the budget process required more information and more transparency, causing the presidents to ask how they could make it better and more transparent.

For each process, 80% of respondents noted the importance of having a common framework holding conversations so individuals could openly communicate and collaborate. One president noted about the evaluation process,

*It allowed us to say this is what we are not doing well and it wasn't blaming. It wasn't you aren't doing this well; it was as an institution we're not doing this well. So what are we as an institution going to do? What support do we need to give the people doing the work? I think that makes a really good difference.*

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe how exemplar community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. This chapter presented the data summarizing the major themes for the research questions. The data were derived from interviews with 15 exemplar community college presidents in WA State, 15 observations of the presidents, and review of 26 artifacts. The data were coded and synthesized, which yielded several emergent themes across the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. The analysis identified the lived experiences of the presidents and the specific behaviors used to proactively transform or resolve conflict as they attempted to find common ground and produce breakthrough results by using collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and processes.

Chapter V presents a final summary of the study, including major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions. The chapter includes implications for action,

recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections of the researcher.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the lived experiences of exemplar community college presidents and how they established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. The six domains studied were collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and process. The research questions asked in this study included the central question and six sub-questions, one for each of the six domains. The central question was, “What are the lived experiences of exemplar community college presidents in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?” The sub-questions were:

1. Collaboration - How do exemplar community college presidents use collaboration to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
2. Communication - How do exemplar community college presidents use communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
3. Emotional Intelligence - What aspects of emotional intelligence do exemplar community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
4. Ethics - How do exemplar community college presidents use ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?



5. Problem-Solving - How do exemplar community college presidents use problem-solving strategies to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?
6. Process - What processes do exemplar community college presidents use to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results?

### **Findings**

The central purpose of this study was to discover and describe how exemplar community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors. A summary of the key findings discovered and presented in Chapter IV is presented with respect to the central research question and sub-questions.

### **Central Question**

The central question was “What are the lived experiences of exemplar community college presidents in establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors?” The major findings revealed four overarching behaviors displayed by all of the exemplar community college presidents:

1. Exemplar community college presidents transformed conflict by making data-driven decisions.
2. Exemplar community college presidents created an environment for common ground to occur.
3. Exemplar community college presidents understood the need to find common ground to resolve conflict.

4. Exemplar community college presidents were able to successfully facilitate common ground discussions.

### **Sub-Questions**

To help discover and describe how exemplar community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results by engaging in elements of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors, a question was asked for each of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and process.

**Collaboration.** Collaboration was consistently used to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. In analyzing the data from the research sub-question regarding collaboration, the results yielded five specific collaboration behaviors exemplar community college presidents used.

Exemplar community college presidents collaborated with their peers on a regular basis. They collaborated with local community leaders and also made a habit of regularly collaborating with the Board of Trustees. Another behavior they exhibited was fostering an environment where collaboration was paramount.

**Communication.** In analyzing the data from the research sub-question regarding communication, the results yielded four specific communication behaviors used by the exemplar community college presidents.

Community college presidents used communication to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by understanding when to communicate as “the president”. They also understood that they must communicate on an individual basis with the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and

Students. These exemplar leaders also understood the importance of being an active listener. Lastly, they exhibited exemplar behavior in that they built relationships through communication.

**Emotional intelligence.** In analyzing the data from the research sub-question regarding emotional intelligence, the results yielded five specific emotional intelligence behaviors displayed by the exemplar community college presidents.

Community college presidents used emotional intelligence to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by understanding the emotions of others. They reported being highly self-aware of who they were as individuals, and had heightened social awareness. These individuals maintained a personal set of guiding principles and they set clear boundaries.

**Ethics.** In analyzing the data from the research sub-question regarding ethics, the results yielded five specific ethics-related behaviors displayed by the exemplar community college presidents.

Specific behaviors exhibited by these exemplar leaders were being authentic leaders; maintaining a high level of integrity, and being honest individuals. They all held strong values systems, led with the heart, and were trustful.

**Problem-Solving.** In analyzing the data from the research sub-question regarding problem-solving, the results yielded three specific problem-solving behaviors displayed by the exemplar community college presidents.

Exemplar community college presidents in this study were universal in that they regularly commissioned work groups/teams to focus on and work through problems. They also made a regular habit of soliciting input/advise from the Board of Trustees.

Finally, because they relied on the executive leaders to manage their departments, they encouraged the executive team to handle/solve problems at their level.

**Processes.** In analyzing the data from the research sub-question regarding processes, the results yielded three specific process-related behaviors displayed by the community college president.

All of the respondents had a clear process in place for everything. One aspect of the process domain that rang throughout all of the presidents was the process of asking questions and collecting data. They were also clear that they had a process for collaborating with the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students. Finally, they were adamant about evaluating the processes they had in place to ensure they were effective.

The results of the sub-questions produced the following. The themes Collaboration, Ethics, and Emotional Intelligence garnered highest number of themes, and Process yielded the highest number of coded references (160/19%).

### **Unexpected Findings**

Several major surprises came out of this study, all of which involved this group of extraordinary leaders, who they were, and the work they performed. This group of presidents, including the full population of 34 presidents, were a close group of leaders who were passionate, thoughtful, and dedicated professionals. They met monthly, sometimes for two or three days in a row, to make decisions, set policies, and provide solutions on issues involving the community college system. This group answered to a number of stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, the executive team, the Board of Trustees, and the local community, each wanting something from the president.

What made this group extraordinary was that they all rose through the ranks to stand alone at the top of their institutions. Through each interview, it was obvious they were passionate about being a lifelong learner. As a matter of fact, when pressed, each talked about how the job of president was just that, a job; it did not define who they were as individuals. As the leader, the only people they could really confide in were their peers, who had a better understanding of who they were as individuals because they worked so closely together.

The presidents came together (collaboratively) as peers to find solutions rather than lay blame. In the midst of their many storms, they all took time out of their busy schedules to participate in this study, with a few offers of mentorship. It was obvious that these extraordinary leaders were masters of their craft; they balanced a number of major issues and dealt with conflict on a daily basis.

The bond this group had with each other was extraordinary and one that should be studied further. This group of exemplar leaders is worth further the research to fully understand how exemplar leaders work through conflict.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the research findings of this study, several conclusions were drawn regarding how exemplar community college presidents established common ground and produced breakthrough results by utilizing the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and process.

Across the 34 community college presidents in WA State, the lived experiences of 15 sitting presidents were examined. It was concluded that these individuals were former

faculty members who rose through the ranks (e.g., faculty, director, dean, vice president) to become president. One president shared:

*Part of being a good president is having good mentors, learning how to delegate, learning that it's okay if you do it differently than everybody else. As a leader, you and I need to agree on what the goals are or the metrics. That involves trust...Particularly as a president of a college, in areas that are not my expertise, which is why collaboration is so important.*

### **Conclusion 1**

The first conclusion based on the research findings is: To establish common ground and produce breakthrough results during conflict, exemplar community college presidents relied on the support of the team and prioritized collaboration.

Exemplar community college presidents relied on the support of the team and prioritized collaboration as a key contributor to their long-term tenure as president. Collaboration led to common ground, resulting in breakthrough results during conflict. According to Tekniepe (2014), community colleges were designed to serve the needs of their local communities. As such, college presidents were called on to lead the collaboration between the college and the community. Successful community college presidents regularly collaborated with various stakeholders and were often called upon to moderate for individuals or groups when there was a difference in goals, visions, or agendas (Hansen, 2013).

This study revealed that collaboration was a key piece of the community college presidents' job. In higher education, collaboration was also referred to as shared governance. The following summarize the major findings related to collaboration:

- This group and their peers made collaboration a priority. Their meetings were structured and meaningful, and facilitated much of the work they performed together for long lasting impacts on the community college system.
- As the chief administrator of their college, the presidents relied heavily on their executive teams for support and collaborative efforts, noting the work would not happen and needed change efforts would fail. A common thought was that failure to collaborate would result in a shortened tenure.
- The presidents identified collaborating and working with local community leaders as the necessary first steps in resolving complex issues. Building relationships with the community made for a more successful presidency.
- Creating time and space for collaboration set these successful college presidents apart from others. Fostering collaborative space became a linchpin for these presidents.
- A failed relationship between the Board and the president would have dire consequences for the college and tenure of the president. All of the presidents went to considerable lengths to strengthen the bonds between themselves and their Board of Trustees.

## **Conclusion 2**

The second conclusion based on the research findings is: To build common ground, community college presidents use strong communication skills, for problem solving during conflict resolution.

Exemplar community college presidents invested time in listening to those they led, resulting in strong relationships with peers, employees, executive teams, Board of

Trustee members, and local community leaders. Using strong communication skills, exemplar leaders effectively problem-solved by creating common ground. Through the literature review, the theorists indicated that an effective leader strove to solve problems through a process of communication and collaboration (Duignan, 2009). The exemplary leaders of this study solved problems through a process of finding common ground, which was especially important as part of their authentic leadership. The following summarize the major findings related to communication:

- Stepping into the job as president changed who they were; the participants in this study knew and understood the job required them to speak on behalf of the college as the president.
- The presidents needed to make personal connections with those around them. They should not take anything personally, kept their doors open, and socialized with those in the organization.
- The job of president required listening, listening, and more listening. By listening, it is easier to know and understand how people feel was just as important as knowing what they thought.
- Building relationships through communication was a major component of the job of president, which was supported by 95% of the presidents in this study. Communication and strong relationships with peers, employees, executive teams, Board of Trustee members, and local community leaders were critical.



### **Conclusion 3**

The third conclusion based on the research findings is: A key component used for building Common Ground by Community College Presidents, is having high ethical and moral standards.

Exemplar community college presidents maintain high ethical standards derived from having a strong sense of self-preservation. This was considered essential for navigating through political minefields, conflict, and job pressures, which were daily occurrences, being self-aware of ethical pitfalls prevents a shortened tenure as president.

High ethical stands were used in major decision-making to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. Upholding a strong moral compass was important to the respondents and each had their own-shared stories of how they became president. Exemplar community college presidents had a high level of moral and ethical integrity, which was used to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. In a study of potential college presidents, all noted that to be exceptional leaders it was imperative to understand how to be and appear to be ethical, which were critical to being an exemplar president (Mangan, 2015).

Their experiences showed they had a firm grasp on (1) how they expected people to be treated, and (2) ensuring behaviors were consistent with school values. These two components were of the upmost importance to the presidents.

The presidents also indicated that educational leaders needed to be clear about their core values and vision for their school, and understand how those values and vision can motivate and inspire their staff and students. They also noted that communicating on

a regular basis created a culture of mutual trust and understanding important for finding common ground. Others, stated that once they built a culture of trust, then communication was likely to flow more easily. Making their personal values explicit and well-understood by key stakeholders assisted them to interpret communications.

Community college presidents used ethics to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. Key findings related to their use of ethics included:

- It was important to be authentic when working through conflict. The simple jester of a having an open door policy helped break down barriers.
- Exemplar presidents led with personal values.
- Exemplar leaders always did the right thing, especially when no one was looking.
- Lost trust meant that individuals had no faith in the leader's ability to perform the job.

#### **Conclusion 4**

The fourth conclusion based on the research findings is: Intelligent Community College Presidents who are honest and maintain a high level of integrity, are highly successful in establishing common ground during conflict

In a study conducted by Mayer et al. (2008), community college presidents scored in the average ranges of emotional intelligence; they understood the concepts of emotional intelligence, used them daily, and believed that emotional intelligence was needed for effective leadership. The same authors indicated community college presidents would benefit from high emotional intelligence to better manage relationships with the Board of Trustees, community leaders, college faculty, staff, and students.

Community college leaders who dealt with conflict, which in most cases was on a daily basis, approached each situation openly and honestly, utilizing emotional intelligence (Slaff, 2011). Other findings related to emotional intelligence included:

- To make it to the top of the organization, the presidents reported needing a keen awareness of who they were and what they represented. Authentic leadership was a must.
- During times of conflict, in the end, it was about the people served. Thus, it was important to be cognizant of how they were treated, personal reactions and emotions, and how everyone worked together.
- The presidents noted the importance of leaving the office, getting out of comfort zones, and socializing. The quickest way to understand the basis for conflict was to be involved and network.

## **Conclusion 5**

The fifth conclusion based on the research findings: In order to be more effective in creating common ground during conflict, community college presidents strive to empower their executive teams to manage conflict at their level.

The executive, with the backing of their president, feel that they are empowered to manage their division deans and directors, and they are able to solve problems at their level, which was critical to establishing common ground and producing breakthrough results.

Exemplar community college presidents were keenly aware that any and all problems at the college were their problems, and solving those problems quickly helps to resolve conflict. VanLehn (1996) asserted the problem-solving model required

understanding the problem first, then solving the problem. The process of problem-solving took communication and collaboration (Roueche et al., 2014), which naturally linked several of the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors.

Problem-solving was a behavior noted as a key component of the job of the community college president. They often accomplished problem-solving responsibilities by obtaining and working through data. Data were considered a powerful tool, which were used to cut programs, increase or decrease funding, add or remove resources, and ensure efforts supported the mission.

Problem-solving strategies were often used to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. Findings related to problem-solving included:

- Commissioned work groups or teams, and training them to handle conflict at their level, is a critical component to resolving issues at the lowest level possible.
- Exemplar leaders empower their faculty and staff to bring them options and possible solutions, not just problems.
- The job of president required leaving campus to attend meetings and work with the community, which meant that many problems needed to be resolved and handled at the lowest level possible and often became the responsibility of the executive teams.

## **Conclusion 6**

The sixth conclusion based on the research findings is: Results of this study identified that exemplar community college presidents develop and use processes for all situations related to conflict in order to create common ground.

Exemplar community college presidents have a process in place for all aspects of their job, including specific processes for working through conflict and finding common ground. Presidents have made it a priority to establish a process for every aspect of the job as president, so as to resolve conflict.

Processes were used in multiple ways by the community college presidents. The process of collaboration was used to work through conflict, which often involved councils comprised of classified staff and faculty from every division. The presidents reported nearly everything went through these councils, which was truly shared governance. Processes related to communication included soliciting and getting feedback. The presidents also noted the importance of evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of various processes across the college.

Community college presidents used processes to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results. Key findings included:

- The presidents approached conflict resolution by collecting and presenting data, and then asking questions for clarification.
- Working with the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students to help resolve conflict because it provided opportunities to collect input, gain buy-in, and transform individuals who resisted the change and caused the conflict.
- All processes must be vetted for effectiveness.

## **Conclusion 7**

The seventh conclusion based on research findings is: Exemplar community college president leaders achieve breakthrough results when three or more conflict transformational behaviors are utilized.

To be successful when working through conflict, those presidents who during this study, it was apparent that when presidents linked three or more domain behaviors together, they were more successful in transforming conflict. The following sections present examples of how domains were linked together by the community college presidents.

**Collaboration, communication, ethics, and emotional intelligence.** Exemplar community college presidents used collaboration, communication, ethics, and emotional intelligence in combination to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by working on issues of diversity, inclusion, and fair hiring practices, as well as having a diverse workforce.

Astin and Astin, (2000) wrote that collaboration was a necessary element for executive leaders in higher education. In particular, the authors noted that transformational leaders who relied heavily on strong collaboration skills were more successful. This was consistent with the major findings of this qualitative inquiry, which identified collaboration as one of several common trends and behaviors used by exemplar community college presidents. Within their official capacity as president, all 15 respondents noted that collaboration was the centerpiece of their job, often using collaboration to bring individuals to the table to resolve conflict. Within the higher education system, collaboration was also referred to as shared governance, meaning to

share in the planning and decision-making processes of the college. Shared governance (i.e., collaboration) allowed the president to engage in the practice of sharing the decision-making process of running the institution. Collaboration pushed stakeholders to invest in and take ownership of the college. Additionally, the presidents indicated that shared governance reduced the amount of conflict at the college because it provided for increased transparency.

The presidents reported they routinely collaborated with their peers, which empowered them to break through conflict. They also cited using collaboration to resolve issues with local community leaders and collaborating with the Board of Trustees on matters related to how the college was ran. By fostering an environment where collaboration was paramount and through regular collaboration with the executive team, the presidents were able to reduce and work through conflict.

In WA State, there have been significant increases in the number of hate crime incidents, a lack of transparency in the hiring practices at the community college system, and an absence of faculty, staff, and administrators of color in key positions (Smith, 2015). It was through discussion and collaboration across the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students that people realized that these issues, if left unchecked, could lead to an incident similar to the one that occurred at the University of Missouri.

The community colleges presidents decided to implement diversity initiatives on their campuses. This included collaboratively developing and designing initiatives, which began with the hiring of a Diversity and Inclusion Administrator on each campus.

This move highlighted the importance of ethics and emotional intelligence, which were both noted as highly important by the study participants.

The respondents were keenly aware of the societal implications of their actions, and a few of the presidents encountered some pushback on their campuses for creating yet another administrative position. One president held open forums and question and answer sessions so stakeholders could express their perspectives, and the president disseminated a consistent message to the campus community about needing a more diverse workforce that reflected the growing diverse student population. The need for such communications was also a consistent theme across study participants.

**Collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and processes.** Exemplar community college presidents used collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and processes to establish common ground and produce breakthrough results on issues related to student conflicts with instructors, grade appeals, and fairness.

VanLehn (1996) asserted that the problem-solving model required understanding the problem before solving the problem. Working through problems took communication and collaboration (Roueche et al., 2014). The literature supported the notion that when college presidents resolved conflict, they were more successful when combining three or four behaviors. Problem-solving, at the president level, was a process that involved communicating with the parties involved and collaborating on a solution.

When issues arose, the respondents said they took the time to listen, allowed people to voice their thoughts, and then they would respond. During the observations, it was noted that when the presidents interacted with individuals, rather than taking notes or getting distracted, they stayed in the moment and were always present.



## **Conclusion 8**

The eighth conclusion based on research findings is: Exemplar community college presidents achieve breakthrough results during conflict when data is used during the decision making process.

The presidents used a multitude of tactics to reduce and resolve conflict. Core to finding common ground and transforming conflict was making data-driven decisions, which was referenced 161 times across the data sources. Each president made a habit out of using data to drive their point. If there was resistance to change, they presented the data.

In addition to data-driven decision-making, the presidents reported using other tools and strategies to work through conflict and find common ground. Creating open lines of communication was noted by all the respondents. The respondents also ensured that decisions were tied to the mission, vision, and values of the college, and often directed those who were conflicted back to the shared mission and values. The presidents also solicited feedback and gathered data, often holding open forums and discussions, and allowed individuals with concerns to come directly to them. Overall, the presidents used the six domains of conflict transformation regularly to find common ground and produce breakthrough results. Key findings related to finding common ground were:

- Exemplar presidents transformed conflict by making data-driven decisions.
- Exemplar presidents created open lines of communication that reduced conflict and tied decisions to the mission, vision, and values of the college.

Transformational leaders who established common ground and produced breakthrough results relied on elements related to the six domains of conflict

transformation behaviors: collaboration, communication, emotional intelligence, ethics, problem-solving, and processes. Four predominant themes emerged from the research: exemplar community college presidents (a) transformed conflict by making data-driven decisions, (b) created an environment for common ground to occur, (c) understood the need to find common ground during times of conflict, and (d) successfully facilitated common ground discussions.

### **Implications for Action**

This research found that exemplar community college presidents are lifelong learners and still feel compelled to continue with their own educational growth. The following implications from this body of research would benefit those seeking to become presidents at the community college level or similar leadership positions. Additionally, these findings could further provide those in current leadership positions, in particular first-time college presidents, with the necessary tools to become exemplar in their behaviors when working through conflict to produce breakthrough results.

#### **Implication for Action 1**

In the first 100 days of becoming a new president, a president must develop and implement processes and procedures for handling any and all types of conflict. Presidents identified that conflict was present on a daily basis on campus, but it was managed by engaging stakeholders at all levels by focusing on collaboration with stakeholders by:

- Establishing personal relationships with individuals in the organization.
- Commissioning workgroups or teams to resolve the conflict and empowering them to develop data-driven solutions.

- Establishing a specific procedure for asking clarifying questions to form a better understanding of the nature of the conflict.

### **Implication for Action 2**

Develop a process that is a systematic approach to enhancing ongoing engagement with all stakeholders (board members, deans and executive teams) that are both formal and informal. Presidents must develop a strategically focused process and systematic approach to enhance ongoing formal and informal engagement with all stakeholders (e.g., the Local Community, Board of Trustees, Executive Team, Faculty, Staff and Students). Examples include: holding one-on-one meetings, hosting coffee with the president, attending monthly dean meetings, and traveling to conferences, all of which would provide open communication and dialog. In addition, to further engage stakeholders, consider:

- Ensuring decisions are tied to the mission, vision, and values of the college, and directing those in conflict back to the mission and values.
- Removing all barriers when working with a team and providing continuous support through all aspects of the process. If they need resources, time off, or encouragement to attend conferences, then every effort must be made to accomplish that and support them.

### **Implication for Action 3**

To achieve breakthrough results during conflict, presidents must make informed decisions by using meaningful and purposeful data when navigating chaotic situations.

An office must be created to develop instruments to gather appropriate data for the president to make informed decisions. Examples of data include: enrollment, graduation rates, completion rates, diversity, faculty feedback, student feedback, etc.

Once data was analyzed, presidents in this study shared the data with stakeholders and developed a multitude of tactics, alongside stakeholders, to reduce and resolve conflict. The rate of resolution increased when data were used in the decision-making process.

#### **Implication for Action 4**

To ensure the next generation of community college presidents are afforded the same opportunities, it is recommended that sitting presidents systematically mentor executives within their organization so as to cultivate the next generation of exemplar community college presidents. Bring them in and walk them through the process of ethical decisions and provide them with the knowledge and tools to succeed.

The majority of the presidents were first generation college students who felt a need to cultivate the next group of presidents, and the following are suggested to identify the next generation of potential presidents:

- Serve as a coach to senior executives interested in becoming president.
- Identify, recruit, and train those who desire to become president.
  - Identify potential prospects through a pre-president program (e.g., a one-year development program).
  - Identify prospects through the application process or recommendations from the executive team.
  - Require a letter or recommendation from a sitting president.

- Create a screening committee of sitting presidents for potential applicants who:
  - Demonstrated a commitment to diversity and inclusion
  - Had experience in achieving the dream initiatives
  - Were committed to student success
  - Were committed to lifelong learning (training, education)

### **Implication for Action 5**

Further preserve and enhance the collaborative professional nature of the presidency, it is recommended that the sitting presidents engage in a collaborative community college president institute that would create a safe environment for them to focus on foundational and advanced personal and professional objectives. The presidents reported a keen awareness of who they were, what they represented, and what they needed to do to transform conflict. This awareness was a learned behavior over time.

Presidents and those on the path to becoming president would benefit from continuous education and training that is specifically related to personal and professional development outside their scope and role as president. Working on these aspects would benefit them personally and professionally, as well as provide the basis for making them more holistic leaders, by focusing on themselves rather than the organization. Specific suggestions include:

- Complete an individual professional development plan focused on signature strengths, workplace collaboration skills, diversity and inclusion practices at the executive level, team management at the executive level, and communication strategies.

- Develop a strategic plan to ensure values align with personal and professional goals by writing and implementing a personal mission statement, considering how you want to be viewed as a leader, and listing the top five things that stand in the way of becoming a successful president.
- Invest in being a leader by identifying three personal and three professional goals, explaining why these goals are important, establishing a timeline for completion, journaling progress, sharing with people outside the organization, and assessing whether the goals were accomplished.

The actions, if implemented, could transform current community college presidents into exemplar presidents and better prepare the next generation of community college presidents. When applying the six domains of conflict transformation behaviors, and combining three or more behaviors, the success rate for presidents increased, conflict was reduced, and these individuals were more adapt to facilitate discussions toward finding common ground during conflict.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the research study and findings, it is recommended that further research be conducted in the development of common ground by:

1. Including a cross-section of community college presidents from other states.
2. A study looking at the combination of the domains could provide. The results of this study had a strong indication that when leaders combined the six domains to transform conflict, they were more successful.

3. A study that is focused on whether presidents are introverts vs. extroverts and if it impacts their ability to transform conflict. A few presidents voluntarily shared personal reflections on the concept of being an introvert vs. an extrovert and how it impacts their approach to leading.
4. Additionally, it would be appropriate to encourage and plan for the next generation of leadership in higher education, a study that is focused on the readiness of executive administrators and how they utilized multiple domains in transforming conflict.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

This entire process transformed me and how I view community college presidents. As a tenured faculty member in the community college system, I had a huge disconnect with the office of the president, mainly because I was so wrapped up in my daily responsibilities; I was narrow in my view of the job they perform for the college.

I used to think of the president as The Wizard of Oz, the mysterious person behind the curtain. Pulling the curtain back, I found they were passionate about their jobs, went to great lengths to resolve issues at their institutions, and a few were more concerned for the people that worked for them than themselves, which blew my mind. Upon my first interview, it was evident this was an extraordinary group of leaders. During almost every interview, I was asked about my plans after I finish my doctorate, offered mentorship, and offered opportunities to shadow a Dean so that I could get a sense of the job.

I discovered a couple of big moments/realizations. The job of president was a lonely position and they relied heavily on peer support. The president did not have the

comforts afforded by being a part of a union, nor did they have any job security. At any time they could be replaced by a vote of no confidence or if the Board of Trustees thought they were not upholding their responsibilities. When I looked behind the curtain, it was obvious they had the power and status (positional authority) that came with the job, but these individuals went through the extraordinary process of building lasting relationships with their peers, executive teams, and Board of Trustees, which provided them the ability to perform their jobs.

The one surprising part of this entire study, was the revelation that the presidents collaboratively had a huge impact on how all of the community colleges in the state conducted business. I believe that more faculty members should know the work that goes on with this group. A great example was when I attended a faculty meeting regarding the implementation of a diversity requirement for graduation. I asked my colleagues if they had read the diversity statement from the presidents and got no response. One person thought the president was nothing more than a political figure that had no idea what the faculty did. So there it was, conflict in its raw form, which was caused by a lack of communication and full understanding of the program. This is the nature of the community college system; conflict exists, but it is next to impossible for the president to fix all of the problems. I know that common ground exists, but it takes a leader who embraces who they are, communicates, and empowers others to work through the conflict. If conflict is to be transformed, leaders must be exemplar in their behavior and facilitate it appropriately, and at the level of the president, it was more about who they were as leaders rather than how they led.



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# APPENDIX A

## Synthesis Matrix

<b>Purpose Statement:</b>  <b>The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover and describe how successful community college presidents establish common ground and produce breakthrough results by utilizing the 6 domains of conflict transformation behaviors: Communication, Collaboration, Ethics, Emotional Intelligence, Process, and Problem-Solving.</b>	<b>Common Ground</b>	<b>Conflict</b>	<b>Communication</b>	<b>Community College Presidents</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>Ethics</b>	<b>Emotional Intelligence</b>	<b>Higher Education</b>	<b>Process</b>	<b>Problem-Solving</b>	<b>Other</b>
Akiri, A. A. (2013). Seeking Common Ground for a Leadership, Culture and Diversity in Changing Times. <i>International Review of Social Sciences &amp; Humanities</i> , 5(2).	X										
Altbach, P. G., Gumport, P. J., & Berdahl, R. O. (2011). American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.								X			
American Association of Community Colleges. (2015). <i>About community colleges</i> . Washington DC: Author. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.aacc.nche.edu/ABO/UTCC/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.aacc.nche.edu/ABO/UTCC/Pages/default.aspx</a>								X			
Amey, M. J., Vanderlinden, K. E., & Brown, D. F. (2002). Perspectives on community college leadership: Twenty years in the making. <i>Community College Journal of Research &amp; Practice</i> , 26(7-8), 573-589.			X					X			
Anderson, L. A., & Anderson, D. (2010). <i>The Change Leader's Roadmap: How to Navigate Your Organization's Transformation</i> .											X

<i>How to Navigate Your Organization's Transformation:</i> John Wiley & Sons.											
Arnone, M. (2003). Students face another year of big tuition increases in many states. <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i> , 49, A24.								X			
Aspen Institute. (2013). <i>Using labor market data to improve student success</i> . Washington, DC: Author								X			
Astin, A. W., & Astin, H. S. (2000). Leadership Reconsidered: Engaging Higher Education in Social Change.			X					X			
Avolio, B. J. (2005). <i>Leadership development in balance : made/born</i> . Mahwah, N.J.: L. Erlbaum.											X
Bagadiong, N. S. (2014). Leadership development for aspiring community college presidents (Doctoral dissertation). Available from Proquest Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: Humanities, 75.			X					X			
Basham, L. M. (2010). Transformational and transactional leaders in higher education. <i>International Review of Business Research Papers</i> , 6(6), 141-152.											X
Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1993). Transformational leadership and organizational culture. <i>Public administration quarterly</i> , 112-121.											X
Basu, A., & Mermillod, M. (2011). Emotional Intelligence and Social-Emotional Learning: An Overview. <i>Online Submission</i> , 1(3), 182-185.							X				
Beehler, M. C. (1993). The Changing Role of the Community College President in Washington State.			X					X			

<i>Community College Review</i> , 20(4), 17-26.											
Bligh, M. C., & Riggio, R. E. (2013). <i>Exploring distance in leader-follower relationships : when near is far and far is near</i> . New York; London: Routledge.											X
Boggs, G. (2004). <i>The leader as agent of change and stability</i> . Paper presented at The American Association of Community Colleges Future Leader Institute in Long Beach, California.			X								
Bogue, E. G. (1994). <i>Leadership by design: Strengthening integrity in higher education</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass											X
Bradberry, T., & Greaves, J. (2012). <i>Leadership 2.0</i> . San Diego, CA: TalentSmart.											X
Brown, L., Martinez, M., & Daniel, D. (2002). Community college leadership preparation: Needs, perceptions, and recommendations. <i>Community College Review</i> , 30(1), 45-73.			X								
Burns, J. M. (1978). <i>Leadership</i> (1st ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Row											X
Campolo, C. (2005). Treacherous ascents: On seeking common ground for conflict resolution. <i>Informal Logic</i> , 25(1).	X										
Carmichael, G., & Malague, M. (1996). <i>How to resolve conflicts effectively</i> . Paper presented at the meeting of the Annual International Conference of the National Community College Chair Academy in Phoenix, AZ. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 394 572).			X								
Ciulla, J. B. (1995). Leadership ethics: Mapping the territory. <i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i> , 5(1), 5-28						X					

Clark, H. H., & Brennan, S. E. (1991). Grounding in communication. <i>Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition</i> , 13, 127-149.				X							
Cohen, A. M., Brawer, F. B., & Kisker, C. B. (2013). <i>The American community college</i> : John Wiley & Sons.								X			
Creswell, J. W. (2007). <i>Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions</i> (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.											X
Creswell, J. W. (2013). <i>Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.											X
Daft, R. (2014). <i>The leadership experience</i> : Cengage Learning.											X
Degenhardt, L., & Duignan, P. (2010). Key Challenges in School Reinvention. <i>Dancing on a Shifting Carpet: Reinventing Traditional Schooling for the 21st Century</i> , 27.								X			
Deichmann, D., & Stam, D. (2015). Leveraging transformational and transactional leadership to cultivate the generation of organization-focused ideas. <i>The Leadership Quarterly</i> , 26(2), 204-219.											X
Dike, V. E. (2015). Leadership and Management in the 21st Century Organizations: A Practical Approach. <i>World Journal of Social Science Research</i> , 2(2), 139.											X
Duignan, P. (2012). <i>Educational leadership: Together creating ethical learning environments</i> : Cambridge University Press.			X								
Duree, C. A. (2008). <i>The challenges of the community college presidency in the new</i>			X								

<i>millennium: Pathways, preparation, competencies, and leadership programs needed to survive.</i> ProQuest Information & Learning, US.										
Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: a meta-analysis comparing women and men. <i>Psychol Bull</i> , 129(4), 569-591.										<b>X</b>
Eddy, P. L. (2005). Framing the Role of Leader: How Community College Presidents Construct their Leadership. <i>Community College Journal of Research &amp; Practice</i> , 29(9-10), 705-727.			<b>X</b>					<b>X</b>		
Eddy, J. P., Murphy, S. D., Spaulding, D. J., & Chandras, K. V. (1998). 21st century leadership practices needed for higher education. In S. D. Murphy & J. P. Eddy (Eds.), <i>Current issues in higher education: Research and reforms</i> (pp. 3-14). Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc			<b>X</b>					<b>X</b>		
Eisenberg, E. M., & Goodall, H. L. (2004). <i>Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint</i> : Bedford/St. Martin's Boston.				<b>X</b>						
Fullan, M. (1999). <i>Change forces: The sequel</i> : Psychology Press.										<b>X</b>
Gillet-Karam, R. (1999). <i>Preparing Department Chairs for Their Leadership Roles. New Directions for Community Colleges, Number 105</i> : ERIC.			<b>X</b>							
Goff, D. G. (2003). What Do We Know about Good Community College Leaders: A Study in Leadership Trait Theory and Behavioral Leadership Theory.			<b>X</b>							
Goleman, D. (1995). <i>Emotional intelligence: How it can matter</i>						<b>X</b>				

<i>more than IQ</i> . New York, NY: Bantam.											
Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2013). <i>Primal Leadership, With a New Preface by the Authors: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence</i> : Harvard Business Press.							X				
Goodwin, G. P., Piazza, J., & Rozin, P. (2014). Moral character predominates in person perception and evaluation. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i> , 106(1), 148-168											X
Gray, B. (1989). Collaborating: Finding common ground for multiparty problems.	X										
Greenleaf, R. K., & Spears, L. C. (1998). <i>The power of servant-leadership: Essays</i> : Berrett-Koehler Publishers.											X
Guffey, M. E., & Loewy, D. (2012). <i>Essentials of business communication</i> : Cengage Learning.				X							
Hamme, D. (2015). <i>Customer focused process innovation: linking strategic intent to everyday execution</i> . New York, NY: McGraw Hill Education											X
Hansen, M. (2013). <i>Collaboration: How leaders avoid the traps, build common ground, and reap big results</i> : Harvard Business Press.					X						
Harvey, T. R., Bearley, W. L., & Corkrum, S. M. (1997). <i>The practical decision maker: A handbook for decision making and problem solving in organizations</i> . Lantham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.									X		
Hay, I. (2006). Transformational leadership: Characteristics and criticisms. <i>E-journal of</i>											X

<i>Organizational Learning and Leadership</i> , 5(2).											
Hellriegel, D., & Slocum Jr, J. W. (2009). <i>Organizational Behavior</i> , 12/e. Aufl., Cengage, Mason/Ohio.											
Hockaday, J., & Puyear, D. E. (2000). <i>Community college leadership in the new millennium</i> . Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.				X		X	X				
Hodkinson, P., Anderson, G., Colley, H., Davies, J., Diment, K., Scaife, T., Wheeler, E. (2007). Learning cultures in further education. <i>Educational Review</i> , 59(4), 399-413.								X			
Horowitz, J. (2007). Making every encounter count: Building trust and confidence in the police. <i>National Institute of Justice Journal</i> , 256, 8-11						X					
Hughes, B. (2015). Recruiting, Retaining, and Benefiting From a Diverse Community College Faculty: A Case Study of One College's Successes. <i>Community College Journal of Research and Practice</i> (ahead-of-print), 1-14.					X			X			
Ibarra, H., & Hansen, M. (2011). Are you a collaborative leader? <i>Harvard Business Review</i> , 89(7/8), 68-74.					X						
Jacobsen, W. (2000). Why common ground thinking works. <i>Educational leadership</i> , 57(4), 76-80	X										
Jenkins, P. D. (2011). <i>Redesigning community colleges for completion: Lessons from research on high-performance organizations</i> . New York, NY: Columbia University Academic Commons								X			
Johnson, D. (2007). Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 Birmingham campaign											X



as image event. <i>Rhetoric &amp; Public Affairs</i> , 10(1), 1-25.											
Kecskes, I., & Zhang, F. (2009). Activating, seeking, and creating common ground: A socio-cognitive approach. <i>Pragmatics &amp; Cognition</i> , 17(2), 331-355.	X										
Kouzakova, M., Ellemers, N., Harinck, F., & Scheepers, D. (2012). The Implications of Value Conflict How Disagreement on Values Affects Self-Involvement and Perceived Common Ground. <i>Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin</i> , 38(6), 798-807.	X										
Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2002). <i>The leadership challenge</i> (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.				X	X	X					
Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2010a). <i>The five practices of exemplary leadership</i> (Vol. 237): John Wiley & Sons.				X	X	X			X		X
Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2010b). <i>The truth about leadership: The no-fads, heart-of-the-matter facts you need to know</i> : John Wiley & Sons.				X	X	X	X		X		
Lederach, J. P., & Maiese, M. (2003). Conflict transformation. <i>Beyond Intractability</i> .											X
Leslie, D. W., & Fretwell Jr, E. (1996). <i>Wise moves in hard times: Creating &amp; managing resilient colleges &amp; universities</i> . San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass			X					X			
Lovett, C. M. (2002). Tough times for colleges demand structural changes. <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i> , 49(8), B12			X					X			
Mangan, K. (2015). Potential new Leaders of 2-Year Colleges Face Higher Hurdles. <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i> .		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
March, J. G., & Weiner, S. S. (2003). Leadership Blues. <i>New</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

<i>Directions for Community Colleges</i> , 2003(123), 5.										
Maxwell, J. C. (2010). <i>Everyone communicates, few connect: What the most effective people do differently</i> . Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.		X		X						
Mayer, J. D., Roberts, R. D., & Barsade, S. G. (2008). Human abilities: Emotional intelligence. <i>Annu. Rev. Psychol.</i> , 59, 507-536.				X		X				
McCallum, J. S. (2013). Followership: The Other Side of Leadership. <i>Ivey Business Journal</i> .			X							X
McDonald, C. (2012). <i>An investigation into factors leading to the longevity in tenure of California community college presidents</i> (Doctoral dissertation). Available from Proquest Dissertations & Theses. (UMI no. 1026585663)			X					X		
McFarlin, C. H., Crittenden, B. J., & Ebbers, L. H. (1999). Background factors common among outstanding community college presidents. <i>Community College Review</i> , 27(3), 19-32			X					X		
McKee, A., Boyatzis, R. E., & Johnston, F. (2008). <i>Becoming a resonant leader: Develop your emotional intelligence, renew your relationships, sustain your effectiveness</i> : Harvard Business Press.							X			
McMahon, J. T. (2010). <i>Leadership classics</i> . Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press.										X
Moody, G. V. (1978). State-local partnership in junior college governance. <i>New Directions for Community Colleges</i> , 1978(23), 69-74	X	X	X					X		
Moriarty, D. (1992). The president as moral leader. <i>Dilemmas of leadership: Decision making and</i>			X			X				

<i>ethics in the community college</i> , 51-70.											
Murray, J. P., & Kishur, J. M., Jr. (2008). Crisis Management in the Community College. <i>Community College Journal of Research and Practice</i> , 32(7), 480-495.			X					X			
Nordin, N. (2011). The influence of emotional intelligence, leadership behaviour and organizational commitment on organizational readiness for change in higher learning institution. <i>Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences</i> , 29, 129-138.								X			
Obama, B. H. (2015). <i>State of the union address</i> [Transcript].							X				
Odetunde, O. J. (2013). Influence of Transformational and Transactional Leaderships, and Leaders' Sex on Organisational Conflict Management Behaviour. <i>Gender &amp; Behaviour</i> , 11(1), 5323-5335.											X
Olson, G. M., & Olson, J. S. (2000). Distance matters. <i>Human-computer interaction</i> , 15(2), 139-178.											X
Patton, M. Q. (2002). <i>Qualitative research and evaluation methods</i> (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications											X
Peterson, K. D., & Deal, T. E. (1998). How leaders influence the culture of schools. <i>Educational leadership</i> , 56, 28-31.								X			
Pettitt, J. M., & Ayers, D. F. (2002). Understanding conflict and climate in a community college. <i>Community College Journal of Research &amp; Practice</i> , 26(2), 105-120. doi: 10.1080/106689202753385465		X	X	X	X	X		X			

Plinske, K., & Packard, W. J. (2010). Trustees' perceptions of the desired qualifications for the next generation of community college presidents. <i>Community College Review</i> , 37(4), 291-312. doi: 10.1177/0091552109356980			X					X			
Pope, M. L., & Miller, M. T. (2005). Leading from the inside out: Learned respect for academic culture through shared governance. <i>Community College Journal of Research and Practice</i> , 29(9-10), 745-757.			X	X				X			
Posner, B. Z., Kouzes, J. M., & Schmidt, W. H. (1985). Shared values make a difference: An empirical test of corporate culture. <i>Human Resource Management</i> , 24(3), 293-309.						X					
Potts, C., & Catledge, L. (1996). Collaborative conceptual design: A large software project case study. <i>Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)</i> , 5(4), 415-445.					X						
Putnam, L. L., & Wilson, C. E. (1982). Communicative strategies in organizational conflicts: Reliability and validity of a measurement scale. <i>Communication Yearbook</i> , 6, 629-652.			X	X							
Price, J. H., & Murnan, J. (2004). Research limitations and the necessity of reporting them. <i>American Journal of Health Education</i> , 35(2), 66-67											X
Robbins, S. P. (1974). <i>Managing organizational conflict: A nontraditional approach</i> : NJ, Prentice-Hall.			X								
Rodriguez, F. (1999). <i>Educational Transformation: Fort Riley University</i> . Doctoral dissertation. Fort Riley			X								X

University, 1999). Dissertation Abstracts International, 63.											
Römer, M., Rispens, S., Giebels, E., & Euwema, M. C. (2012). A helping hand? The moderating role of leaders' conflict management behavior on the conflict–stress relationship of employees. <i>Negotiation Journal</i> , 28(3), 253-277. doi: 10.1111/j.1571-9979.2012.00340.x		X									
Roueche, J. E., Baker III, G. A., & Rose, R. R. (2014). <i>Shared vision: Transformational leadership in American community colleges</i> : Rowman & Littlefield.		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Salkind, N. J., & Rainwater, T. (2003). <i>Exploring research</i> . Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall											X
Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. (1990). Emotional intelligence. <i>Imagination, Cognition, and Personality</i> , 9, 185-211. Salovey1859Imagination. <i>Cognition, and Personality</i> 1990.							X				
Sanderson, L. P. (2011). <i>Choosing the next best president: Organizational process or ceremonial ritual? An ethnographic look at the inner dynamics of presidential search committees at two community colleges</i> . (72), ProQuest Information & Learning, US.			X								X
Schermerhorn, J. R., Osborn, R., & Hunt, J. G. (2008). <i>Organizational behavior</i> (10th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons				X	X	X					
Schilling, D. (2012, November). 10 steps to effective listening. <i>Forbes</i> .				X							
Schramm, W. (1954). How communication works. <i>The</i>				X							

<i>process and effects of mass communication</i> , 3-26.										
Shults, C. (2001). The Critical Impact of Impending Retirements on Community College Leadership.			X					X		
Singer, P. (2011). <i>Practical ethics</i> : Cambridge university press.						X				
Slaff, N. (2011). The emotional intelligence of college and university presidents: an exploratory study. <i>International Journal of Humanities and Social Science</i> , 1(11), 1-10.							X			
Snowe, O. (2013). <i>Fighting for Common Ground: How We Can Fix the Stalemate in Congress</i> : Weinstein Publishing.	X									
Strike, K. A., Haller, E. J., & Soltis, J. F. (2005). <i>The ethics of school administration</i> . New York, NY: Teachers College Press.						X				
Stuart, H. (2014, December). New York City protests Eric Garner decision. <i>The Huffington Post</i> .		X								
Sullivan, L. G. (2001). Four generations of community college leadership. <i>Community College Journal of Research &amp; Practice</i> , 25(8), 559-571.			X					X		
Tan, A., & Manca, D. (2013). Finding common ground to achieve a “good death”: Family physicians working with substitute decision-makers of dying patients. A qualitative grounded theory study. <i>BMC Family Practice</i> , 14(1), 14.	X			X						
Taylor, R. L., Rosenbach, W. E., & Rosenbach, E. (2008). <i>Military leadership: In pursuit of excellence</i> : Westview Press.										X
Teichler, U. (2015). Diversity and diversification of higher education: Trends, challenges and policies. <i>Educational Studies</i> , 1, 14-38.								X		

Tekniepe, R. J. (2014). Linking the Occupational Pressures of College Presidents to Presidential Turnover. <i>Community College Review</i> , 42(2), 143-159.			X							
Thomas, C., & Beckel, B. (2007). Common ground: How to stop the partisan war that is destroying America. New York, NY: Harper.	X									
Thompson, M. D. (2011). <i>Presidential transition: The experience of two community college interim presidents</i> . (72), ProQuest Information & Learning, US.			X							
Ty, R. R. (2011). <i>Human rights, conflict transformation, and peace building: The state, NGO's, social movements, and civil society - the struggle for power, social justice and social change</i> (Doctoral dissertation). Available from Proquest Dissertations and Theses. (UMI No. 3473109)										X
Van Rooy, D. L., & Viswesvaran, C. (2004). Emotional intelligence: A meta-analytic investigation of predictive validity and nomological net. <i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i> , 65(1), 71-95.							X			
VanLehn, K. (1996). Cognitive skill acquisition. <i>Annual review of psychology</i> , 47(1), 513-539.										X
Vaughan, G. B. (1986). <i>The Community College Presidency</i> : ERIC.			X					X		
Vaughan, G. B. (1990). <i>Pathway to the presidency: Community college deans of instruction</i> . Washington, DC: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.			X					X		
Vaughan, G. B. (1992). <i>Dilemmas of Leadership: Decision Making</i>		X	X	X		X		X		

<i>and Ethics in the Community College: ERIC.</i>											
Wallin, D. L. (2007). Ethical leadership: The role of the president. In D. M. Hellmich & G. R. Boggs (Eds.), <i>Ethical leadership in the community college: Bridging theory and daily practice</i> (pp. 33-45). Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company.			X					X			
Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2008). <i>2008 strategic master plan for higher education</i> . Olympia, WA: Author.			X					X			
Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board. (2012). <i>Key facts about higher education in Washington</i> . Olympia, WA: Author.			X					X			
Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (2014). <i>2015-17 biennial operating budget request</i> . Olympia, WA: Author.			X					X			
Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (2015). <i>System direction</i> . Olympia, WA: Author.			X					X			
Wenrich, J. W. (1980). Can the President Be All Things to All People? <i>Community and Junior College Journal</i> , 51(2), 36-40.			X					X			
Wyatt, W. (2014). <i>Communication skills: The ultimate guide to improve your communication skills and get your ideas across</i> . San Bernardino, CA: William Wyatt.				X							
Zanjani, M. M. (2012). Voices of experience: understanding and enhancing successful conflict management by community college presidents.		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			



## APPENDIX B

### Scripted Questions

#### Specific Script Question

##### Collaboration

###### General Question

*Set up: Collaboration can be a key component in transforming conflict within many organizations.*

1. Can you share a story about a time when you used “collaboration” with internal stakeholders who were experience conflict to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results?
2. What about with external stakeholders? Can you share a story about a time when you used “collaboration” as the leader of your organization to find common ground during times of conflict with external stakeholders?
3. In your experience as the organizational leader how has collaboration been a key element in finding common ground to navigate through conflict with stakeholders?

###### Follow-up questions

1. What were the specific aspects of collaboration that created breakthrough results?
2. What was the final result?

##### Communication

###### General Question

1. Can you share a story about a time when you used “communication” as the leader of your organization to find common ground and achieve breakthrough results with internal or external stakeholders to move through conflict?
2. Please share an experience you’ve had as the leader of the organization when “communication” was a critical aspect in finding common ground with stakeholders?

###### Follow-up questions

### **Specific Script Question**

1. How did you use communication to transform the conflict into a more positive situation?
2. How did communication play a critical role in your efforts?
3. What was the final result?

### **Emotional Intelligence**

#### General Question

1. Please tell me about a time when emotional intelligence helped you to transform conflict and find common ground?
2. Can you describe a time when you used self-awareness or self-management to transform a particularly difficult conflict?
3. Can you describe a time when you used social-awareness or relationship management to help you breakthrough conflict?

#### Follow-up questions

1. How do you feel that emotional intelligence helped you break through conflict?
2. How do you feel those competencies helped you succeed in transforming the conflict?
3. What common ground were you able to achieve?
4. Can you describe how those competencies helped you succeed?

### **Ethics**

*Set up: as a leader, ethics intersects your job in a number of ways. Your personal ethics, the ethics of your stakeholders, how ethics are related to the practice of the organization.*

#### General Question

### **Specific Script Question**

1. What have been the different types of ethical or moral dilemmas have you have experienced or seen during times of conflict with your primary stakeholders?
2. Most leaders face ethical dilemmas during their tenure. Can you share with me a time when you felt that your ethical values may have been similar or different from those in your organization?

#### Follow-up question

3. What were the steps (processes) did you take to achieve common ground?
4. What was the most difficult part of this process?

### **Problem Solving**

#### General Question

1. Tell me how you engage others in problem solving to achieve common ground.
2. Can you tell me about a conflict situation where you needed to achieve common ground and used problem solving skills to break through the conflict?
3. Which problem solving strategy was most helpful in transforming the conflict to a more positive outcome?

#### Follow-up questions

4. What steps did you take to solve the problem?
5. How do you feel these skills helped you to transform the conflict into a more positive situation?
6. Can you describe the impact of those strategies on those involved in the process?
7. What impact did you have on you?

### **Process**

### **Specific Script Question**

*Set up: As a leader within your organization, understanding and managing various processes is probably not as glamorous as most people are led to believe, but they are necessary.*

### **General Question**

1. Can you talk about processes, and in particular, if you had any conflict and what processes that you used with those who were resistant or in conflict?
2. What processes have you utilized to transform or neutralize a heavy conflict situation so that parties could engage in constructive dialogue?

### **Follow-up questions**

3. What process did you use to establish common ground?
4. I am interested to know your process on how you get people on your team to move beyond consensus to common ground?
5. What was the final result?
6. How important of a process is this to a leader within their organization?

*This concludes our interview. Do you have any other information that you would like to add or share regarding your experiences with common ground or any of the six domains?*

### **Conclusion of interview:**

*Thank you very much for your time and support in completing this research. I will send, through email, the transcription of our interview for your feedback. If you would like a copy of my final research findings once my research is accepted by the university, I would be happy to share it with you.*

*Thank you again.*

## APPENDIX C

### Demographic Survey



#### Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions:

1. What is your current position in the organization?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How long have you been serving in this role within your organization?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. For how many different colleges/universities have you worked?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How long have you been in higher education?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Which professional organizations related to your role do you belong to, if any?

6. Have you published any articles or papers, or presented at conferences?

7. Please indicate which best describes your age category:

21-25 \_\_\_\_\_ 66-75 \_\_\_\_\_

26-40 \_\_\_\_\_ 76+ \_\_\_\_\_

41-65 \_\_\_\_\_

8. Please indicate your highest area of educational attainment and in what area of study:

High School: \_\_\_\_\_ Area(s) of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Bachelors: \_\_\_\_\_ Areas (s) of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Masters: \_\_\_\_\_ Area(s) of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate: \_\_\_\_\_ Area(s) of Study: \_\_\_\_\_

☐

Participant# \_\_\_\_\_ ☐

## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent



Page 1 of 2

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#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM!

**INFORMATION ABOUT:** A qualitative study to discover and describe common ground strategies used by exemplar community college presidents to proactively transform and resolve conflict as they attempt to shape the future.

**BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY**  
**16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD**  
**IRVINE, CA 92618**

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Karen J. Bolton

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** The purpose of this phenomenological study is to discover and describe how the lived experiences of the exemplar community college presidents, through their own stories, in their own contexts and environments established common ground, and produced breakthrough results to reduce or avoid conflict by utilizing the 6 domains of conflict transformation behaviors. Through the combined efforts of the peer researchers in this thematic study, the outcomes may yield new and exciting information that can be duplicated by future researchers and ultimately generalized to the larger population.

This study will fill in the gap in the research regarding the use of the 6 common ground domains. While there is a substantial amount of literature regarding common ground, the 6 domains of Common Ground (ethics, emotional intelligence, communication, collaboration, process and problem-solving), law enforcement, and conflict independently, there is a gap in the literature about how these different domains may be being used by exemplar leaders to find breakthrough results. A very significant gap in the literature exists about how exemplar community college presidents would use the six domains of common ground to achieve breakthrough results and reduce or eliminate conflict.

By participating in this study I agree to participate in a private one-on-one interview. The one-on-one interview will last between 30 – 60 minutes and will be conducted in person and audio recorded. Completion of the one-on-one interview will take place August through October,

I understand that:

\_\_\_\_\_ a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked safe that is available only to the researcher. I understand the audio recordings WILL NOT be used by the researcher beyond the use as stated in initial scope of this research.

\_\_\_\_\_ b) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding the use of common ground strategies by community college presidents. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide the results of the available data and summary and recommendations. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

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Participant# \_\_\_\_\_!

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## INFORMED CONSENT FORM!

\_\_\_\_\_ c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by **Karen Bolton**. He can be reached by e-mail at **bolt1801@mail.brandman.edu** or by phone at **360.509.5392**.

\_\_\_\_\_ d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_ e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the **Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641**.

\_\_\_\_\_ f) I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the "Research Participant's Bill of Rights." I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature  
Karen J. Bolton, M.A.O.L.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

!

Participant# \_\_\_\_\_!

## APPENDIX E

### Research Participant's Bill of Rights



#### BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

##### Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.



## APPENDIX F

### Interview Protocol

#### One-on-One Interview Protocol

**Time of Interview:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Interviewer:** Karen J. Bolton

**Interviewee:**

Beginning of interview:

*Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening President \_\_\_\_\_,*

- a) Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this interview. As part of my dissertation research, I am interviewing Community College Presidents who are exemplar leaders of their organization.*
- b) The purpose of the interview is to learn about your experiences as a community college president and your use of collaboration, communication, ethics, emotional intelligence, process, and problem solving in finding common ground to reduce or avoid conflict.*
- c) The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and will include questions around those six topics, with possible follow-up questions if I need further clarification.*
- d) Is this still a good time to complete this interview?*
- e) Any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of my data will be reported without reference to an individual or an institution. After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you so that you can check to make sure that I have captured your thoughts and ideas accurately. I want to make this interview as comfortable as possible for you, so at any point during the interview you can ask that I skip a particular question or discontinue the entire interview.*
- f) With your permission, I would like to tape record this interview so that I ensure that I capture your thoughts accurately. Would that be okay with you?*
- g) Do you have any questions before we begin?*

Before asking the specific questions, can you please tell me a little bit about your experience in higher education?