AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF


Title: An Examination of Leadership at Leah Meyer Austin Award Winning Colleges within the Achieving the Dream National Reform Network

Abstract approved: ____________________________________________________________

Earl “Joe” Johnson

Background. As part of the nationwide student completion agenda, the Achieving the Dream (ATD) national reform network was established to help community colleges quickly institute sustainable change scaled to impact all students at the institution in a short period of time. Although ATD has been in existence for over a decade, the majority of colleges who have become part of ATD have not yet succeeded in increasing levels of student retention or completion or the closing of persistent achievement gaps.

Living systems theory provided a useful theoretical framework for this study. According to Capra (1996), living systems theory emphasizes that human systems, much like ecosystems, do not function well as hierarchical structure. All components of a system are vital to its function, each individual having inherent value in the functioning of the whole. That said, individuals do play unique roles within living systems (Youngblood, 1998). Each unique role plays an important part in creating effective systemic change. A keystone role in any process of change within an institution is that occupied by the senior leader. It is the role of the chief executive officer (CEO) to set the stage and to provide the vision of what must change and why, and what is required of the system for continued external integration. ATD’s intention is to help CEOs paint this picture for their colleges (Burke, 2014; MDRC, 2014).
Purpose. The purpose of this study was to determine what role CEOs play in significant change in student outcomes as defined by the Achieving the Dream national community college reform network’s stated objectives of creating a culture of evidence, raising retention and completion rates, and closing achievement gaps within community colleges. The study identified leadership practices of CEOs which have contributed to significant movement in ATD's five key indicators: (a) increase retention rates, (b) increase precollege course completion rates, (c) increase completion rates of initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English, (d) increase college-level course completion, and (e) increase credential attainment.

Setting. Interviews took place via Skype with individuals from three ATD Leah Meyer Austin Award (LMAA)-winning colleges.

Subjects. The three community college CEOs who committed themselves, their core team leaders, and leadership coaches to participate came from colleges that varied in situation and size. All participants were in their respective positions at the time their colleges won the LMAA.

Research design. A multiple-case study approach was used to examine leadership practices employed to increase student success through sustained innovations at three ATD LMAA-winning colleges. The study sought the perspectives of the college CEOs, core team leader, and ATD leadership coaches about leadership practices that contributed to an environment in which there was a measurable increase in student success. An additional source of data was any available documentation of these efforts.

Data collection and analysis. Using semi-structured interviews, interview data were subjected to two coding cycles that used the theoretical framework of living systems theory as a lens to interpret the data. Comparing the literature with the findings provided a way to ensure
the findings reliability as well as search for potential new themes that might emerge. In addition, the individual interview process included member-checking using narrative accuracy to reflect and summarize the participants’ interviews. A process of triangulation was made possible by interviewing three participants in the change process at each of the three colleges and incorporating relevant documents.

Findings and implications. Confirmed through a process of triangulation with nine interviews and documents from three different colleges, the practices can be generally organized into five broad themes: communicating the importance of improving student outcomes to the college community, commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision making, empowerment by the CEO of college personnel to lead institutional change efforts, effort on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to the community, and significant realignment of resources for ATD efforts.

This qualitative study will aid future leaders in adopting effective leadership practices that will help more ATD and non-ATD colleges to move quickly to effectively increase student retention and completion and to reduce achievement gaps within the context of the student completion agenda. The colleges included here have quantifiably documented improvements in student outcomes as defined by ATD.

Conclusions. Based on the findings of this study, significant institutional change resulting in an increase in positive student outcomes is coupled closely with intentional practices executed by the college CEO. While there are differences in the individual stories of how each CEO led his or her respective college, there is overlap in the 92 relevant leadership practices that surfaced during the course of the nine interviews at the three LMAA-winning colleges. It is clear
that CEOs’ actions were seminal in helping move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA winners within the ATD network.

*Keywords:* Completion agenda, Achieving the Dream, Leah Meyer Austin Award, Presidential/CEO community college leadership, living systems theory, institutional change, change leadership, leadership practices.
An Examination of Leadership at Leah Meyer Austin Award Winning Colleges within the Achieving the Dream National Reform Network

by

Thomas Allen Broxson

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Thomas Allen Broxson, Author
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Chapter I: Focus and Significance

Despite historic successes and amid serious contemporary challenges, community colleges need to be redesigned for new times. (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012)

Rapid change in society is placing unprecedented expectations on the leaders of our educational systems, and community colleges are not immune. Community college presidents and chancellors (CEOs) are receiving clear signals from accreditation associations, politicians, governing boards, and the public regarding the need to significantly improve student retention and completion rates while closing longstanding achievement gaps and maintaining access (Carnevale, 2015; Carnevale & Rose, 2011; Craig, 2015; Executive Office of the President, 2014; Zeidenberg, Scott, & Belfield, 2015). The need to significantly improve student retention and completion rates is taking place in the context of a growing societal expectation that educational systems do more with fewer resources to both increase student success and better align with industry needs (Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2010; Brock, 2010; Carey, 2015; Crow & Dabars, 2015; Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007; Nguyen, 2012; Silva & White, 2014). While open-door admission remains a hallmark of America’s community colleges, there remains concern over the graduation rates based on racial/ethnic group composition (American Association of Community Colleges, 2015; McClennen, 2013; National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011). Graduation rates at community colleges are twice as high for those from the wealthiest families compared to students from low-income families (Belfield & Bailey, 2011; Carnevale, 2012; Shapiro, Dundar, Yuan, Harrell, & Wakhungu, 2015).
Additionally, White students succeed at much higher rates than do African American and Latino students (Berkner & Choy, 2008; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Strumbos & Kolenovic, 2016). While 22% of White students graduate from community colleges within three years, only 10.8% of African Americans and only 16.2% of Latino students do (Bailey, 2012). Increasingly, the message to community college leaders is that they must increase student success and close demographic gaps in achievement despite the long-term cuts to funding (Alfred & Eddy, 2012; Doyle, 2010; Kezar & Carducci, 2009; Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013; Roueche, Richardson, Neal, & Roueche, 2008).

As part of the nationwide student completion agenda, the Achieving the Dream (ATD) national reform network was established to help community colleges quickly institute sustainable change scaled to impact all students at the institution in a short period of time (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011; Hess, Schneider, Carey, & Kelly, 2009; Lumina Foundation, 2014). ATD developed five key indicators: (a) increase retention rates, (b) increase precollege course completion rates, (c) increase completion rates of initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English, (d) increase college-level course completion, and (e) increase credential attainment by which to quantify how a college is performing and what progress toward improvement is being made.

ATD places the role of the chief executive officer (CEO) of each community college or community college district at the fore of their model of cultural change and continuous improvement in these five key indicators. It is clear that the leadership of the CEO, be that a president or chancellor, is seminal to the success of work within the ATD network (Achieving the Dream 2016; American Association of Community Colleges & Association of Community
College Trustees, 2012; Jackson, 2011; Kezar, 2016). This aligns with a larger literature affirming that CEOs are essential agents in promoting a culture of change (Basham, 2010; Boyd & Bright, 2007; Cornelius, 2013; Erwin, 2009; Fullan, 2001; Kimmens, 2014; Lebile, 2012; Senge, Jaworski, Scharmer, & Flowers, 2004; Shugart, 2013).

ATD offers a conceptual framework to aid leaders in systemic institutional change by providing a formula for colleges to internally integrate and adapt to external expectations. ATD includes just over 220 institutions throughout 34 states and the District of Columbia, which in turn reach 3.8 million community college students of the 12.2 million enrolled in for credit classes in the fall of 2015 (AACC, 2017; Achieving the Dream, 2017). The network focuses on helping colleges close achievement gaps to accelerate success among diverse student populations by providing effective and timely research, best practices, and advice (Achieving the Dream, 2017).

ATD formed to help more community college students succeed and was particularly concerned about student groups that traditionally have faced the most significant barriers to success, including low-income students and students of color. ATD works on multiple fronts, including changes in the institutional practices and policies at participating colleges. Although ATD has been in existence for over a decade, the majority of colleges who have become part of ATD have made limited progress in increasing levels of student retention or completion or the closing of persistent achievement gaps. Thus far there are also mixed results in reaching the network's stated objectives of creating a culture of evidence and increasing levels of student success (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins 2015; Jenkins & Cho, 2014; Jenkins, Kadlec, & Votruba, 2014; Mayer, et al., 2014).
Research Problem

Although the majority of colleges who have become part of ATD are experiencing mixed results, some colleges have succeeded in significantly increasing student success while participating in ATD (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2013; Wyner, 2014). Just over 100 colleges have documented improvements in retention and completion and have been named Achieving the Dream Leader Colleges (Achieving the Dream, 2016). Currently, a review of the literature reveals that researchers do not yet have a clear understanding of why some colleges are successful in engaging their communities in creating a culture of evidence leading to better results for students, while others colleges have not been successful in significantly improving retention and completion rates. This study addressed the role of the leadership practices of the CEO with reference to how the college was successful in shifting its culture and achieving ATD’s stated outcomes. This study was designed to help researchers and practitioners form a qualitative perspective to understand the role of leadership practices in creating a climate of change by relying on a culture of evidence to increase student retention and completion rates in select ATD colleges.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify what practices CEOs at select ATD colleges have used to achieve significant positive increases in student outcomes as measured by increases in retention and completion as defined by the ATD national community college reform network. Significant change has been defined by the ATD national community college reform network as creating a culture of evidence, raising retention and completion rates, and closing achievement gaps within community colleges. The study attempted to identify the leadership practices of CEOs at selected institutions which have contributed to significant movement in ATD's five key
indicators: (a) increase retention rates, (b) increase precollege course completion rates, (c) increase completion rates of initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English, (d) increase college level course completion, and (e) increase credential attainment.

The colleges included in the study have met the highest standards set by ATD for institutional change and measurable positive movement in ATD’s five key indicators. Colleges with significant change for this study are defined as those that have been awarded leader college status within the ATD network, indicating meaningful movement on ATD’s five key indicators at a scale that impacts all students at the institution. An additional threshold of significant change was used: Only colleges that have also won the ATD Leah Meyer Austin Award (LMAA) were included in this study, as the award signifies the highest degree of quantifiable institutional change as defined by ATD. This award annually recognizes an ATD institution that has demonstrated outstanding progress in achieving organizational and cultural change in pursuit of a student-success vision that integrates all of its individual efforts into a cohesive strategy. Twelve colleges have thus far been awarded the LMAA since its initial award in 2009 (Achieving the Dream, 2017).

By identifying these effective leadership practices, this qualitative study will aid future leaders in adopting effective leadership practices that will help to move more ATD and non-ATD colleges to more quickly and effectively increase student retention and completion and reduce achievement gaps within the context of the student completion agenda (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). The colleges included here have quantifiably documented improvements in student outcomes as defined and documented by ATD. This qualitative study attempted to identify leadership practices formative to this level of institutional change.
Research Question

This study addresses the following research question: What leadership practices were evident in CEOs’ actions that helped move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA winners? Little research has focused on leading significant change at community colleges (Kezar, 2016). Little research thus far has addressed this important issue within the context of the completion agenda and more specifically ATD’s efforts, which are based on improvements in student outcomes that reflect the ability of the college to implement strategic change at scale. At the time of writing this dissertation, a review of the literature did not reveal an existing study that has investigated leadership at LMAA-winning schools.

Significance/Justification of Importance

ATD is based on the premise that in order to substantively improve student performance, colleges must fundamentally change the way they operate. Recognizing that each college is organic and unique in both the individuals and the systems that comprise the organization, ATD allows each institution to rely on institutional data to understand the problems and challenges it faces related to retention and completion. Colleges see, often for the first time, their institutional retention and completion rates longitudinally and disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, wealth, and many other criteria. This allows each college to see that the status quo is not acceptable (Broxson, 2016; Gonzales, 2012). The premise of ATD is that, if communicated effectively throughout the institution, data can be turned into meaningful information that can be utilized to make better decisions. Essentially, the system becomes prepared for change, moving from a sense that all is fine, or equilibrium, to a sense that everything must change, or disequilibrium. Each college is then encouraged to network with and learn from other colleges.
to create a set of solutions by which to address the challenges it sees in its own institutional data (Achieving the Dream, 2016; Kezar, 2013).

ATD colleges analyze their own institutional data to determine where students face barriers and where achievement gaps exist for students. ATD’s model for conducting this analysis and practice is a five-step process: (a) commitment by leaders to improve student outcomes, (b) use of data to prioritize actions, (c) engagement of stakeholders to help develop a plan, (d) strategies for implementing, evaluating, and improving, and (e) establishment of a culture of continuous improvement (Achieving the Dream, 2016).

After ATD colleges have been in the network for a few years, they are able to apply for leader college status. To receive this status, they must have demonstrated the ability to implement meaningful interventions at a scale that impacts students across the institution and demonstrate positive movement in one or more of the five key indicators-fall-to-winter retention, fall-to-fall retention, precollege course completion, gateway course completion, college level course completion, and degree/certificate completion. Colleges that have obtained leader college status are eligible to apply for the Leah Meyer Austin Award, which annually recognizes an Achieving the Dream Institution that has demonstrated outstanding progress in designing a student-focused culture that permeates all levels and structures of the organization. The winner of the Leah Meyer Austin Award receives a $25,000 award, and its work is highlighted at the national ATD DREAM conference and ATD publications.

The stated goal of the movement is to help all colleges in the network reach leader college status (Achieving the Dream, 2016). Leader colleges are intended to serve as mentors in the network. By 2016, over 100 schools had reached leader college status, meaning that just
over 45% of the colleges in the ATD network had attained at least this threshold of the network's measurable outcomes (Achieving the Dream, 2016). According to ATD, while the majority of the nation’s community colleges have not been able to achieve improvements in student success, leader colleges, at least to some degree, have been able to achieve success by implementing the network's seven capacities:

1. Leadership & Vision – The commitment and collaboration of the institution’s leadership with respect to student success and the clarity of the vision for desired change.

2. Data & Technology – The institution’s capacity to collect, access, analyze, and use data to inform decisions, and to use powerful technology to support student success.

3. Equity – The commitment, capabilities, and experiences of an institution to equitably serve low income students, students of color, and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate.

4. Teaching & Learning – The commitment to engaging full-time and adjunct faculty in examinations of pedagogy, meaningful professional development, and a central role for them as change agents within the institution. Also, the college’s commitment to advising, tutoring, and out-of-classroom supports as well as restructuring developmental education to facilitate student learning and success.

5. Engagement & Communication – The creation of strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, such as K-12, universities, employers, community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes.

6. Strategy & Planning – The alignment of the institution with the umbrella goal of student success and the institution’s process for translating the desired future into defined goals and objectives and executing the actions to achieve them.

7. Policies & Practices – The institutional policies and practices that impact student success and the processes for examining and aligning policies and practices to remove barriers and foster student completion. (ATD, 2016, p. 2)
Leader colleges’ adherence to these seven capacities, other factors, or some combination of the capacities and factors may determine why some schools are effective at internally integrating and implementing ATD’s stated objectives of creating a culture of evidence, raising retention and completion rates, and closing achievement gaps. Leadership, however, is certainly salient among these and was the capacity this study focused on (Kezar, 2013; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). The other principles would likely not develop without a high degree of engagement from the CEO (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002). While much remains to be accomplished in the reconfiguring of the community college system to better match the educational needs of today’s students, ATD is certainly the most significant large-scale effort within the community college system in many decades (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). As pressure mounts on the community college system to increase completion, discovering more precisely which leadership practices lead to gains in ATD's five key indicators is increasingly significant and urgent.

**Research Significance**

Research demonstrates that low levels of student retention and completion at the nation’s community colleges are not simply a function of the behavioral patterns of the students, but are also impacted by structural and cultural characteristics inherent in the institutions themselves. If retention and completion rates are to change in any meaningful way, there must be a change to a culture focusing on student access and success from the front counter where the students first encounter the college to the board of trustees that manages the institution (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). While we know much about the overarching strategies within ATD, and the
process of institutional change has a rich tradition in the academic literature, no study to date has attempted to identify what leadership practices were evident at colleges crossing the threshold of change that brings them to leader-college and LMAA-winning status. The literature review for this study focused on the leadership practices fostering institutional change grounded in living systems theory and transformative leadership within community colleges. Both the literature review and the study itself add to the theoretical and research literature concerning leadership and organizational transformation.

**Practical Significance**

The intended audiences for this study are all parties interested in identifying the leadership practices that contribute to addressing the concerns which have been presented by the completion agenda, including the relatively low retention and completion rates and enduring achievement gaps within the community college system (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). More specifically, the intended audience comprises researchers and practitioners who are interested in identifying the leadership practices associated with colleges that have successfully improved student outcomes as defined within the ATD network (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011; The Aspen Institute 2013, 2014). Additionally, universities and institutes working to develop educational leaders may be able to use the results to enhance their curricula by including skill development modeled on the practices of successful LMAA-winning college CEOs.

Others who will benefit from this study are boards of trustees hiring new CEOs. In 2016 alone, nearly one in four community college CEOs turned over (Smith, 2016). Board members have an interest in knowing what practices they should seek evidence of in order to hire someone
who can be successful in relation to the student completion agenda (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). Such information will help them make better hiring decisions.

Additionally, current CEOs could utilize this study for self-evaluation, particularly in light of the ATD objectives. These CEOs could then identify areas in which they may need to seek out additional professional development (Davis, Dent, & Wharff, 2015). Ultimately, those who will benefit most from increased student success within the community college system are the over 12 million students who enroll in community colleges annually.

**Theoretical Perspective**

ATD’s seven capacities align well with, and draw much from, living systems theory (Davis, 2013; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007; Kimmens, 2014; Lebile, 2012; Wheatley, 2001). Living systems theory emphasizes that systems, like ecosystems, do not function as hierarchical structures (Capra, 1996). All components of a system are vital to its function, each individual having inherent value in the functioning of the whole. That said, individuals do play unique roles within living systems (Youngblood, 1998). Each unique role plays an important part in creating effective systemic change. A keystone role in any process of change within an institution is that occupied by the senior leader (Davis, 2013; Kimmens, 2014; Lebile, 2012; Malm, 2008; Nevarez & Wood, 2010, 2012). It is the role of the CEO to set the stage and to provide the vision of what must change, why it must change, and what is required of the system for continued external integration. ATD's intention is to help leaders paint this picture for their colleges (Burke, 2014; MDRC, 2014). Systems thinking is a vital trait for today’s community college leaders if they are to enact the systemic changes needed for the system to grow and thrive.
ATD also provides a framework which allows the vision to be articulated in such a way as to paint a positive and compelling picture of what must be accomplished and how the institution will be improved by the process (Achieving the Dream, 2016; González, 2012). It is critical that other senior leaders reporting to the CEO share this vision of systemic change and of internal integration to achieve external adaptation, and then use their control of resources to signal their commitment to making the necessary changes. If CEOs do not provide this clarity, an uncertain signal is received by the rest of the college which can effectively short-circuit the processes of change (Katz, 1997).

This study will help researchers understand how successful leaders leverage their work with ATD to help their community college move from a state of equilibrium to a state of disequilibrium in which it can change and thrive. The intent is to illuminate this work of internal integration to pursue the kind of large-scale systemic change necessitated by the pressures being exerted by the larger environment. Certainly, enhancing the experiences and results for students demands changes in the awareness and roles of everyone at the college, from those at the front desk to advisors to instructors and administrators. While the necessary changes require different actions on the parts of all who come into contact with students, without internal integration that modifies underlying attitudes and beliefs and aligns them with external signals, little progress is possible (Amey, 2005; 2010). Individuals within the organization must come to understand the necessary change. This sensemaking is vital to the system’s effective destabilization and subsequent change (Kezar, 2013; Kotter, 1996).
Because of the size and complexity of systems such as community colleges and the myriad policies and practices that must be altered to make effective systemic change, senior leadership must rely on a distributed leadership model (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002). A leader who relies simply on a hierarchical structure will not succeed (Kotter, 2014; Malm, 2008). Faculty, staff, deans, and directors must be empowered to lead the effort outside the traditional hierarchy and recommend the implementation of interventions that will alter existing practice and policy (Kezar, 2013; O’Banion, 2012; Wheatley, 2001; Wolverton, Gmelch, Montez, & Nies, 2001; Youngblood, 1998). It is important for all members of the system's knowledge to be utilized; specialized knowledge is crucial to the goal of achieving internal integration. This distributed leadership model helps shorten feedback loops and elicits buy-in from all constituencies (Rogers, 2003). This enables not just good decision making but sensemaking and ownership of change throughout the institution, internally integrating the system and allowing the institution to adapt to external expectations and assert its self-organizing or autopoietic nature (Katz, 1997).

Communication is the lifeblood of any system and is vital to any effort at systemic change on the scale of ATD. Clear, open communication creates an atmosphere of transparency and relies on empirical data vital not only to communicate the vision of the necessary change but also to keep the feedback loops flowing and their paths relatively short (McArthur, 2002). By creating a culture of listening, the system is able to capitalize on the knowledge inherent in its constituencies, becoming smarter and capable of moving faster (Kezar, 2013). This type of interaction defines communicative action, namely “interaction in which all participants harmonize their individual plans of action with one another and thus pursue their aims without reservation” (Habermas, 1984, p. 294). This capacity needs to be reinforced by a realignment of
resources that matches the significance of the desired change (Kezar, 2016). This often means defunding parts of the system that are not aligned with the new goals, incentivizing the new subsystems with the realigned resources, and supporting the work with significant professional development opportunities (Trani & Holsworth, 2010). As members of the ATD network, colleges are encouraged to pursue all of these options as a means of increasing student outcomes (Achieving the Dream, 2015).

Systems theory provides an organizing structure for not only studying the large-scale change needed within organizations such as community colleges but also facilitating it. Community colleges are dynamic systems interacting complexly with components of the larger suprasystem in which they reside (Wheatley, 2006). Systems theory uses assumptions formulated to study living beings and their interrelationships at various scales; we can use ideas to visualize the multi-faceted entities that are community colleges. Using an organismic metaphor to describe organizations such as community colleges provides a framework to understand community colleges as social systems with complex properties and subsystems that operate within a suprasystem (Aurm, 1992). They can be viewed as loosely coupled systems in which rules do not always govern actions (Davis & Scott, 2007).

As open systems with permeable boundaries, community colleges function in dynamic equilibrium with their environments with both internal and external output (Bertalanffy, 1968, 1972; Skyttner, 1996). What tends to allow open systems such as community colleges to maintain themselves in steady states are the feedback processes. Positive and negative feedback loops exist in the interplay of subsystems, system, and suprasystem (Davis & Scott, 2007; Weick, 1976).
An assumption of systems theory is that all human systems are purposeful and goal directed. A system such as a community college exists to achieve goals through the collective effort of individuals and groups; often these enter the system from the larger suprasystem. Edgar Schien (1985) described two goals of social systems such as community colleges that interact in an interdependent state. The first is external adaptation, which addresses the mission and purpose of the system; the second is internal integration, which addresses the internal functioning of the system. Ideally, these can lead to a state of dynamic equilibrium. Periods of change necessitate input that creates disequilibrium and the conditions for growth and adaptation (Bridgeforth, 2005). It is possible that a community college could evidence high levels of internal integration without achieving a similar level of external adaptation, but the converse is unlikely. In other words, a college without vision, commitment, cohesion, a sense of caring, and support is unlikely to meet its mission and very unlikely to recognize the need to move to a state of disequilibrium and subsequently change as expected by the larger suprastructure (Burke, 2014; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kezar, 2013). When internal integration is achieved, promoting the need for external adaptation, great things can be accomplished.

In order to face the significant challenges placed upon them from the larger environment within which they exist, colleges, if they are to be successful, must generate significant buy-in from individuals and subsystems that exist within the college, then quickly move at a scale significant enough to successfully change student outcomes (Pope & Miller, 2005). The effect is not unlike what occurs on a winning sports team which has to achieve internal integration to achieve externally. Only when each member of the team performs his or her duties synchronistically with the teammates will the team as a whole be able to perform and achieve at its highest level. It is bringing about this internal integration that is the test of leadership.
(Avolio, 2007). Without adequately communicating the demands being placed on the system or empowering individuals within the system, little is likely to be accomplished. The majority of members of the system must be made aware of the degree to which the system is at rest, in equilibrium, and individuals must be given the authority to respond, to move the system to disequilibrium—a state of learning, change, and growth. Only systems in a state of disequilibrium can continuously adapt to changes in their environments, evolve, and survive (Wheatley, 2006).

Within systems theory, the concept of equifinity applies well here: community colleges as social systems in the context of rapid change. Subgroups develop group boundaries formally and informally that define insiders and outsiders (Aurm, 1992; Kezar, 2013). They develop unique cultures. These cultures may be positive or negative in achieving the system-level goals of external adaptation and/or internal integration. In adapting to a changing environment, the success of a community college is dependent on the facilitating effects of several subsystems, including student services, instruction, administration, faculty, and staff. Subsystems do not usually all have equal power. Power tends to be concentrated at the top of the hierarchy (Aurm, 1992; Bowen, 2005; Kezar, 2013). This highly centralized structure tends toward long feedback loops from the top of the organization to each component subsystem (Rosser, Johnsrud, & Heck, 2003). However, maintaining a flexible vision and implementing some degree of distributive leadership can effectively shorten these feedback loops, improving the quality and quantity of communication (McArthur, 2002). This has the effect of increasing the likelihood of achieving systemic change and decreasing the time to undertake the change (Burke, 2014; MDRC, 2014). Internal integration is vital to any successful attempt at destabilizing the system in order to move it to disequilibrium and to a higher level of performance.
Figure 1.1: Study Overview: An Examination of Leadership at Achieving the Dream Leah Meyer Austin Award-Winning Colleges

**Summary**

The challenges that community colleges face are real. They compete for a decreasing share of tax dollars while expectations of the effective use of those dollars increase. Success indicators such as retention and completion rates are low. The gaps in achievement levels for first-generation, low-income students and students of color persist, exacerbating societal inequities (Kezar & Eckel, 2008). Communicating these challenges to the constituent groups that make up the living systems that we call community colleges is not easy. If leaders can effectively communicate these issues, the systems can be moved from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium, setting the stage for the work of internal integration and external adaptation (O’Banion, 2012).
Living systems theory offers a useful framework for understanding how community colleges function and how they interact with the larger suprasystem, providing a common language and conceptual framework for understanding the need for disequilibrium to spur internal integration in order to adapt to external demands. Living systems theory also offers insight into the necessary leadership conditions by which efforts such as those made possible through ATD can be most effectively applied as a catalyst of change (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; O’Banion, 2012). Without these necessary conditions of creating a sense of disequilibrium and moving the institution toward internal integration, ATD or other reform efforts will not be successful (Youngblood, 1998). ATD allows colleges that already have a strong sense of their mission to use institutional data as a means of creating urgency about the institution’s failure to meet the demands being placed on it by the larger society. If leadership can then move from a role atop a hierarchy to that of facilitators of communication and movers of information amongst a web of actors, the institution has a shot at substantial and meaningful change (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Kezar, 2013; Kotter, 2015). This study identified leadership practices that, if present within the CEO, enable such change (figure 1.1).

The purpose of this study was to identify what practices CEOs at select Achieving the Dream colleges have used to achieve significant positive increases in student outcomes as measured by increases in retention and completion as defined by the ATD national community college reform network. This will be accomplished within the context of living systems theory that influences a cultural change within the included institutions. The research question addressed was the following: What leadership practices were evident in CEOs’ actions that helped move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA winners?
Chapter II: Literature Review

Low levels of student retention and completion at the nation’s community colleges are not simply a function of the behavioral patterns of the students. A change to a culture that focuses on student access and success, from the front counter to the board of trustees, must occur if retention and completion rates are to change in any meaningful way (Bailey & Smith, 2015). While we know much about the overarching strategies within ATD, and the process of institutional change has a rich tradition in the academic literature, no study to date has attempted to identify what CEO leadership practices are common to colleges crossing the threshold of change that allow them to achieve leader college status and Leah Meyer Austin Award (LMAA) winning status. The literature review for this study focused on the role and theory of leadership practices in fostering a transformative culture, transformative leadership within community colleges, and leadership and systems theory.

Community college leaders are increasingly receiving signals from the external environment that they must increase student success and close demographic gaps in achievement despite long-term cuts to funding (ACT, 2012; American Association of Community Colleges, 2015; Carnevale & Strohl 2013; Harper & Wooden, 2009). As part of a nationwide student completion agenda, the ATD national reform network was established to help community colleges quickly adapt to these signals and institute sustainable, scaled change in a short period of time (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011; Lumina Foundation, 2014). While not even a majority of community colleges in the ATD network have been successful in reaching the reform network’s stated objectives, over 100 have earned leader college status.
Twelve colleges have been awarded the LMAA as of 2016. This award annually recognizes an ATD institution that has demonstrated outstanding progress in achieving organizational and cultural change in pursuit of a student success vision that integrates all of its individual efforts into a cohesive strategy. While ATD suggests seven capacities (Leadership and Vision; Data and Technology; Equity; Teaching and Learning; Engagement and Communication; Strategy and Planning; Policies and Practices), to move an institution to change, it is clear that the leadership of the chief executive officer, be that a president or chancellor, is foundational to the success of this work (Achieving the Dream, 2015, American Association of Community Colleges & Association of Community College Trustees, 2012).

My hope is that this study provides, for all parties interested, a clear identification of the leadership practices that contribute to creating the conditions necessary to address the concerns which have been presented by the completion agenda. More explicitly, the intended audience comprises researchers and practitioners who are interested in identifying the leadership practices associated with colleges which have successfully moved within the ATD network to leader college status and are also LMAA recipients. A limitation of this study is that it examines only the first of the seven interrelated ATD capacities. An opportunity for further scholarly inquiry would be a comprehensive look at one other or all seven ATD principles and their role in moving colleges to higher levels of student retention and completion.

For this study, with its focus on the role of the CEO, gaining a better understanding of what leadership practices have been the most effective at catalyzing significant institutional change, not just within higher education but in other fields such as business and health care, was the first purpose of this literature review. This led to a second purpose of this literature review--
gaining an understanding of the literature in the areas of systems change and systems thinking as they pertain to leadership and institutional change within community colleges. With this second purpose it became necessary to expand the literature review to include the fields of business and health care, as the literature pertaining specifically to community colleges is somewhat limited (Mays & Pope, 2000).

Based on the findings of this literature review, it is clear that an opportunity exists for this study to make a contribution to the body of literature in the fields of systems thinking, institutional change, community college leadership, and the role of institutional change structures such as those offered by ATD. As an organization, ATD asserts that college leadership is critical in setting the necessary conditions for increasing student success. While there has been much research on the practices needed for twenty-first century community college leaders to be effective, very little research has addressed the practices present in CEOs of ATD leader colleges and LMAA recipients. No study to date has addressed the leadership practices of CEOs at community colleges necessary to move an institution from a state of equilibrium with low rates of student success to that of a leader and LMAA-winning college in which the institution has demonstrated the ability to significantly change outcomes for students. This study’s identification of the necessary leadership practices within the contexts of systems theory and institutional change will be unique. By exploring community colleges as complex adaptive systems and integrating systems thinking into leadership models for improving organizational performance and adaptive change, this review of the literature offers a view of the realities of community college leadership through the theoretical lens of systems thinking theory in order to verify and/or clarify models of community college leadership and institutional change.
Much has been written about the competencies and characteristics necessary for appointment and tenure of CEOs at today’s community colleges (AACC, 2005; Aspen, 2013; Boggs, 2012; Bonner, 2013; Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Eddy, 2012; Hassan, Dellow, & Jackson, 2009; McNair, 2009; Plinske & Packard, 2010). However, as community colleges are facing increasing pressures from the external and internal environments around budgetary and student success accountability issues, little research has dealt specifically with the leadership practices necessary to lead significant change at community colleges. Additionally, despite a robust body of literature on systems thinking in diverse fields, there is comparatively little evidence of systems thinking’s application to organizational management or leadership per se in higher education and even less in community colleges (Kezar, 2013, 2016). In order to supplement the literature on community colleges, studies in healthcare are included as a suitable comparison based on parallels identified between the two fields (Chaffee, 2009; Johnson, 1993). Institutions in both fields have more than one mission, have autonomous professionals as employees, are funded from multiple sources, and are assessed by organizations outside the institution to assure quality (Chaffee, 2009; Johnson, 1993).

Within the literature addressing significant institutional change, authors employ varying definitions of systems change, and not all authors clearly define the concept, so the constructs are often difficult to identify. Further, there are no clearly accepted methods or metrics utilized for measuring the effectiveness of either significant institutional change or the role of systems thinking within organizations, making it challenging to compare effective leadership strategies within the literature. Additionally, limited literature exists relating systems theory to the role of the CEO in leading institutional change such as that outlined and promoted by ATD. Moreover, the literature on leadership in general and more specifically on community college leadership is
aimed principally at the practitioner; thus books and journals on the topic are of varying scholarly rigor and often offer little in the way of explaining research methodologies used to reach conclusions (Krefting, 1991; Sandelowski, 1986, 1993). Finally, though systems thinking and leading for change have a wide international body of literature, scholarly work focused on the community colleges is limited, as they are primarily American phenomena (Kezar, 2016).

**Databases and Key Words Used in Literature Search Process**

I pursued a dual purpose, leadership strategies for significant institutional change and understanding systems change and systems thinking, in this review of literature. First, a keyword search employed the extensive electronic databases available in the Oregon State University library. The most relevant and relied-on databases, keyword search terms, and most highly cited journals for the themes were identified. The most relevant databases/search engines were Google, Google Scholar, 1Search, Academic Search Premier, ERIC, Education Research Complete, PsycARTICLES, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PSYCINFO, and Science Direct. The keyword search terms utilized were leading change, living systems, systems theory, systems thinking, general systems, cybernetics, critical systems thinking, systemic intervention, community colleges leadership, community college presidents, community college chancellors, community college CEO, community colleges collaboration, community colleges administration, community colleges management, community colleges reform, completion agenda, institutional change, change management, leadership traits, leadership practices, and ATD.

I conducted searches systematically, initially using the broadest search terms and then sequentially narrowing to reflect the specific contexts of interest. Combinations of keywords and
truncated versions of the terms were used to make the search more comprehensive. Examination of reference lists of articles revealed literature that had not been uncovered in the keyword searches. As key journals to the research became apparent, I performed individual searches of these journals as well. In addition to seeking peer-reviewed articles, I explored research published on websites of professional organizations in higher education and systems thinking.

Inclusion criteria were dependent on the literature theme under consideration. For the literature review, I sought sections relating to systems thinking theory in articles, books, and dissertations from foundational and seminal authors. These authors were determined through the appearance of multiple and repeated citations by other authors. For literature associated with nascent themes and empirical studies, context was an important criterion. For articles, books, and dissertations related to systems thinking in higher education, in order to focus the review, literature was excluded if it addressed systems thinking as it pertains to educational curricula; literature was included that related to educational management, administration, and/or leadership. Initially, the community college context was sought as a criterion; however, limited evidence in this context led to the broadening of criteria to include four-year universities and/or colleges. While literature on this topic has increased in recent years, much of it builds on concepts first explored in the business management and healthcare management literature. Additionally, significant overlap existed between the literatures of leading institutional change in business management and healthcare and hospital management.

**Major Themes from the Literature**

Four major themes related to leadership and institutional change emerged from the literature. First, systems thinking is a vital trait for today’s community college leaders if they are
to enact the systemic changes needed. Second, leadership practices inherent to systematic change are the following: having an abundance mindset, taking risks, supporting followers, being collaborative, being principle-centered, being able to move fluidly within a multidimensional leadership model, sensemaking and sensegiving, creating a sense of a leader’s knowledge of self, and having the ability to develop trust. Third are processes which leaders must foster and that are endemic to institutional change. Finally, college CEOs, since they are the principal leaders of colleges, are vital agents in promoting a culture of change.

**Systems Thinking**

The first major theme related to leadership and institutional change is that of systems thinking. Systems thinking refers here to the ability to view systems as wholes rather than compilations of individual components. Davis (2013) examined systems thinking as a competency for community college leaders. This study was a systematic review of literature in both the healthcare and higher education fields and revealed that a leader’s utilization of systems thinking has a beneficial impact on the organization’s performance. However, the study did not identify any specific instances of system thinking being linked to significant institutional change within community colleges. Bereiter (2002) proposed a cognitive, educational psychology perspective on knowledge and the mind in the knowledge age, emphasizing systems thinking for leaders; however, the work provides little by way of application to leading and in particular leading for institutional change. Birnbaum (1988) provided a theoretical and applied analysis of university academic organization and leadership which synthesized the literature on leadership and governance to deliver an understanding of colleges and universities as organizations from a cybernetics viewpoint. The work does provide insights into the subjective nature of studying leadership from this perspective and assures the reader that different perspectives of cognitive
frames do not necessarily compete with each other, but in fact illuminate different aspects of reality.

Bridgeforth (2005) proposed a general theory of social systems. He assumed that as open systems, social systems experience a degree of spontaneous self-organization or autocatalysis by looking for survival through adaptation and change, and he discussed the role of the leader with open systems, though he did not show clearly an application to the change needed within large systems like that of the community college.

Foster-Fishman, Nowell, and Yang (2007) developed a framework utilizing soft systems methodology. This methodology is an approach to organizational process that has been used both for general problem solving and in the management of change for understanding and identifying the fundamental system parts, including leaders and interdependencies, that can help to explain system functioning and leverage systems change. The framework highlighted the importance of attending to both the deep and apparent structures within a system as well as the interactions and interdependencies among system parts. This included attending to the dominant normative, resource, regulative, and operational characteristics, which proved to be a useful framework for this study.

Senge (1999) emphasized the need for a systems-dynamic analysis of how successful change occurs, particularly focusing on the intersection of an inner shift in people’s values, aspirations, and behaviors and an outer shift in processes, strategies, practices, and systems. Here there is noticeable influence on the process laid out by ATD for initiating institutional change at community colleges. This was termed profound change, and it allows organizations to begin doing things in new ways. Expanding on this theme, Wheatley (2001) asserted that within natural systems, change does not happen in a top-down strategic manner, that living systems do
not have a hierarchical structure. Similarly, change to living systems happens when actions are taken simultaneously by many local actors. The CEO plays the vital role of recognizing, empowering, and legitimizing these actions. When these actors become cognizant of similar actions, they strengthen each other. Such actions can emerge suddenly and often surprisingly. Once an emergent phenomenon has appeared, it can be counteracted only by a similar emergent countervailing force. A wide range of studies have identified the role of systems thinking as a seminal leadership trait for community college CEOs (Avolio, 2007; Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Bisbee, 2007; Gates, & Robinson, 2009; Hassan, Dellow, & Jackson, 2009; Hocaday & Puyear, 2015; Kadlec, Immerwahr, & Currie, 2013; McClenney, 2013; McNair, 2009; Plinske & Packard, 2010; Riggs, 2009; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). However, these studies did not examine the role of leaders’ systems thinking ability as a condition necessary to reaching the quantifiable improvements in retention and completion in order to reach leader-college or LMAA-winning status within the ATD network.

**Leadership Practices for Change**

The second theme related to leadership and institutional change is that there are leadership practices inherent to effective systematic change. The simultaneous expectation of enrollment growth and financial reduction are endemic to the environment which community colleges inhabit. Alfred (2012) suggested that in order to navigate such contradictions, leaders must embrace an abundance mindset, in which resources and opportunities are unlimited. Relevant competencies for leveraging an abundance mindset are visioning and optimization, inventiveness, relating and inclusiveness, simplicity, identifying and developing talent, and creating and maintaining a sense of urgency (Alfred, Schults, Jaquette, & Strickland, 2009).
Using a case study methodology, Bennis (2003, 2007) reviewed several leaders, illustrating how leaders can direct the setting in which they find themselves by encouraging the growth of the basic characteristics of leadership: a guiding vision, passion, integrity, trust, curiosity, daring, possessing knowledge of themselves and the world around them, and operating on instinct. The study pointed out how leaders can take action and become more effective by taking risks, learning how to gain the support of followers, and studying ways in which organizations can encourage or hinder leadership.

In 2005, the American Association of Community Colleges released a set of six essential competencies for community college leaders based on data gathered from surveys completed by 95 community college presidents. The competencies included equitable and ethical resource management; effective communication both internally and externally that reflects the college’s mission, vision, and values; a collaborative and inclusive approach; advocacy of the community college mission and goals; and a demonstration of professionalism by working to uphold ethically high standards for self and others. Conspicuously missing from these competencies, however, are the leadership practices necessary to move the community college system to the level of performance advocated by the completion agenda and priorities by ATD. It is this lack of identified practices here and in the literature examined that inform this study’s research question.

Burke (2014) developed an alternative model of instructional leadership for community colleges. The model presented a more collaborative relationship between administration and faculty. This was seen as needed to achieve effective instructional strategies and research-based teaching practice in the classroom. Covey (1990) presented a model of principle-centered leadership which considered both who leaders are and what they do. He laid out a justification
for leaders being guided by principles. These principles fell into four domains: security, guidance, wisdom and power, and character. Principle-centered leaders continually learn, they are service-oriented, and they radiate positive energy. Trustworthiness and character are important themes. Trustworthiness is based on character (what you are as a person) and competence (what you can do).

Eddy (2003, 2005) has written extensively on the CEO’s role in sensemaking within the community college context. Reviewing the six competencies the American Association of Community Colleges developed for community college leaders, Eddy (2010) collected data from 12 community college presidents and a variety of campus members but found that to face challenges, a leader’s core beliefs, sensemaking ability, and the ability to pursue new opportunities are core competencies that must be developed through time. Eddy (2012) built on this work to formulate a multidimensional model which is grounded in four assumptions: There is no universal model of leadership; multidimensional leadership is necessary in complex organizations; leaders often adhere to their core belief structure; and effective leaders for change are learners (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) undertook an ethnographic study of strategic change and Kezar (2013) analyzed case studies of 28 institutions carried out by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (2008). Both suggested that the president’s role in the strategic change process is best understood in relation to the concepts of sensemaking and sensegiving. Connections to these concepts and other theoretical areas were drawn, as well as inferences for understanding strategic change initiation. Kezar (2011) also identified the importance of sensemaking and sensegiving in her study.
Through case studies of hundreds of institutions, Kotter (2006, 2008, 2014) concluded that leading change comprises eight steps: (a) a sense of urgency, (b) the guiding team, (c) visions and strategies, (d) communication, (e) empowerment, (f) celebrating short term wins, (g) never letting up, and (h) making change stick. Urgency was discussed as a necessary first step since it is the most difficult to effectively implement. Urgency is defined and contrasted with the typical organizational norm of complacency. Strategies are identified for increasing urgency so that the desired change can be achieved. Central to strategies for increasing urgency is the leader’s knowledge of self. Van Dam, Oreg, and Schyns (2008) confirmed Kotter’s framework in a detailed study utilizing 235 usable questionnaires drawn from a large housing corporation in the Netherlands, adding length of tenure within an organization as a statistically significant factor in employee resistance to change.

Senge, Jaworski, Scharmer, and Flowers (2004) concluded that learning from the past to face future unknowns is not adequate to address the forces that confront leaders in a world of increasing change and uncertainty. The leadership challenge is to sense and actualize emerging opportunities. Leaders need to develop a new cognitive capacity that involves primary knowing. This leads to the conclusion that the most important tool for leading twenty-first-century change is the leader’s self. The higher one’s self-development, the greater is one’s potential impact as a leader.

In a similar vein, Heifetz (1994) arranged his idea of leadership by focusing on the difference between authority and leadership. Heifetz stated that leaders must distinguish between different categories of problems: those that are technical and those that are adaptive. He argued that while technical problems have knowable solutions, adaptive problems have no known solutions and require changes in thinking and values (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, Grashow, &
Linsky, 2009). Heifetz argued that an authoritative approach is usually effective for dealing with technical problems; it usually does not work when dealing with adaptive problems. He reasoned that adaptive change necessitates that leaders focus their energies on motivating people to participate in difficult dialogs and to do the difficult work of learning to both think and act differently (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

Kimmens, (2014) examined presidential leadership practices of high-performing community colleges. The study’s purpose was to better understand the intersection between leadership and high-performing community colleges in the context of a complex and challenging environment. The study examined the leadership styles of four community college presidents to determine how their leadership influences the performance of their institutions using a multiple cases study method. The study included interviews with four community college presidents serving at colleges selected as winners or finalists of distinction of the Aspen Institute Community College Excellence Program. Four faculty presidents from the same colleges were also interviewed to determine their understanding of how the college president’s leadership influences the performance of the institution. The researcher asked three questions related to presidential leadership and the high performance of the community college. 1) What is the relationship between leadership and high performance at community colleges? 2) What type of leadership styles and frameworks are utilized by presidents at high-performing community colleges? 3) What competencies, knowledge areas, and skills do presidents at high-performing community colleges display? The 9 participants in this study were asked 12 open-ended questions pertaining to community college presidential leadership practices. Results from the study provide insight into the leadership of community college presidents and the high performance of their institutions. Competencies the community college presidents displayed
were highly effective communication skills and collaboration, as well as participatory and inclusive leadership. These competencies, mixed with a strong dedication to student success, supporting the college culture, valuing risk taking and innovation, and relying on the added value and use of measurable student outcomes, were of vital importance in achieving high performance at community colleges. Because this study included only four community colleges nationwide, the findings from this study are not generalizable to all community colleges, nor to all Aspen Institute designated high-performing community colleges. This ground breaking study of high-performing colleges does, however, provide a foundation for further study of high performing colleges such as ATD LMAA-winning colleges and the more specific practices utilized by their leaders.

Much has been written on the leadership practices needed to significantly change an institution that has become established in its practices and outcomes. The bulk of this literature and what is included here comes from the fields of business and healthcare management; some, however, deals more specifically with the community college. The primary limitation of this leadership-traits-for-change theme within the literature is the lack of direct applications to the completion agenda in general and more specifically to the measurable change called for by ATD.

**Processes to Foster Change**

The next theme that emerged related to leadership and institutional change is processes which leaders must foster and that are endemic to institutional change. In a review of existing literature, Amey (2010) identified the strategies used increasingly to meet the needs of multiple constituencies, partnerships, and other forms of organizational collaboration, such as consortia, networks, and learning communities. His article concluded that such relationships are difficult and complex and rely on the interplay of numerous actors with their own motivations and goals;
furthermore, these structures evolve through time and have different leadership and resource needs over time. Leader-centered partnerships are less likely to be sustained over time than those that are more inclusive, encouraging change that is not dependent on existing hierarchy (Amey, 2005; 2010; Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Avolio, 2007; Hogan & Ahmad, 2011; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002).

After examining leadership in a wide range of institutions, Fullan (2001) presented a case for cultivating leadership at all levels of an organization to face the problems for which there are no simple solutions. A framework of five capacities comprises a formulaic model: an inner “pie” of moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making. It is surrounded by an “outer rim” of three of the personal characteristics of leaders: "energy, enthusiasm, hopefulness." Effective leaders thus mobilize commitment, both external and internal.

Drawing mostly on his experiences as a corporate manager, Bolmaan (2001) introduced a widely used template that leads to changes in organizations, a template not dependent on positional power within the existing hierarchy. It is relevant in many organizational settings, including those for professionals who want to actualize those not in positions of authority in order to make a difference in their workplace. It presents a practical model in pursuing aspirations, discovering what is really happening within the organization, building common understanding, facing head-on the organization’s political climate, prioritizing change, determining who can make a difference in the change process, and enlisting those partners. ATD’s model of institutional change draws heavily from this work to help colleges collectively understand where they are, the need for change, and the importance of empowering individuals
to lead that work. This template was a useful lens through which to examine the change process at the LMAA-winning colleges in this study.

Lebile (2012) used a qualitative multiple case study approach to look at two community colleges, one in Texas and the other in North Carolina. These colleges have achieved high levels of student success, have been highly esteemed and recognized by ATD and other community colleges, and have received awards for their student success accomplishments (thought the colleges were not LMAA winners). The qualitative study, focused on people’s experiences from their perspective, ascertained what leadership practices were used to increase student success at two ATD leader colleges. Findings from the study indicated that commitment and support must be priorities of the CEO and other senior leaders of the institution. The study concluded that using data to inform decisions illuminates achievement gaps, that communication between internal and external stakeholders is imperative to effect change, that institutionalization of interventions is essential to sustain student success, and leading with passion is a critical component of leadership. One limitation of this study was a lack of focus on the role of the CEO; instead, a breadth of individuals drawn from the board of trustees, the leadership team, and the faculty was interviewed. A second limitation was that only two ATD leader colleges were examined and the threshold of change inherent in becoming a leader college is not as high as that of those receiving the LMAA

Boyd and Bright (2007) found that appreciative inquiry is a positive, strengths-based theory for leading change contrasted against Lewin’s model for leading change (1947). This comparison precedes a case presentation demonstrating how appreciative inquiry was effectively used by a community organization to formulate its goals and achieve its objectives. Insights from Kotter’s (1996) work on leading change made a compelling case for the power and potential of
four steps for leading change, which are to discover, dream, design, and ultimately achieve
destiny. This theory viewed an organization not from an illness-problem orientation but from an
established-strength perspective which can be harnessed for maturing strength and progressive
goal attainment.

Davis, Dent, and Wharff (2015) presented a conceptual model of systems thinking
leadership which concluded that effective leaders are on a pathway on which they move from
discovery to framing to action when enacting an intervention. However dependent on resources,
time, and the nature of the problem, a leader could enact these components separately. Discovery
and framing practices within a systems thinking leadership framework preceding the
implementation phase helped build a foundation for collaboration in the implementation phase.

Importantly, Stober (2008) noted coaching is an effective tool for implementing and
sustaining change. The effectiveness of this strategy was clarified through the lens of Kotter’s
(1996) eight-step theory for leading change and the Transtheoretical Model of Change as
articulated by Prochaska and Diclemente (1992). Change was most effectively led through a
blend of models, resulting in the following eight stages: (a) Create a sense of urgency; (b) Form a
guiding coalition; (c) Develop a compelling vision and strategy, a vision which must be viewed
as relevant and feasible; (d) Communicate the vision and strategy; leaders must communicate to
the workforce why the organizational change is personally relevant and meaningful to individual
employees; (e) Remove obstacles to change; (f) Create many short-term wins and celebrate these
successes; (g) Use increasing credibility to change systems, structures, and policies that do not
align with the vision; and (h) Articulate the connections between the new behaviors and
organizational success and develop the means to ensure leadership development and succession.
Morest and Jenkins (2007) surveyed 189 college administrators with primary responsibility for institutional research and followed up with 5 more in-depth interviews. They concluded that, in the context of leading change within the ATD framework, there is a need to successfully build a culture of evidence. Building a culture of evidence requires the CEOs as well as the administrators, faculty, and student services staff to understand how to use data in order to understand where students are having problems, create strategies to address problems, and assess the effectiveness of the solutions implemented (Jenkins, 2007; Morest & Jenkins, 2007). They pointed to the commitment and support from the CEO as imperative in establishing a culture of evidence on campus. The CEO must signal commitment to investing in resources to increase their institutional research capacity and also create an atmosphere in which the research is valued and viewed as both beneficial and priority (Morest, 2009; Morest & Jenkins, 2007). ATD recognizes the need for organizational transformation in creating such a climate and calls for college leaders to help nurture a culture of evidence (Morest & Jenkins, 2007).

While the literature on processes that foster change is well established, little has focused on effective change in the community college system. No study to date has identified effective practices of community college CEOs at Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges.

**College CEOs as Change Agents**

The final major theme that emerged within the literature is that college CEOs as leaders are essential agents in promoting a culture of change in the larger system. Literature on the college presidency is typically described as sparse, non-research based and focused on issues that come from a largely practitioner perspective informing a would-be president of key junctures assuming a presidency, leaving and succession planning, or issues such as dealing with stakeholders, fundraising advice, getting buy-in among faculty, and challenges to authority
Much of the literature is focused on personal narratives about the experience and satisfaction of being a president and lessons learned from individual stories. As a result, literature related to leadership development often describes the lack of reliable data to inform efforts for developing leaders (McGovern, Foster & Ward, 2001; Wallin, 2002).

Research about the effectiveness of the college presidency in general and as change agents is limited, mostly conducted as part of dissertation research and focused on traits or skills, behaviors, and competencies, not practices of presidents. Trait studies have few agreed-upon traits and those traits identified are hard to assess, such as *good moral character* or *passionate about education* (Plinske, 2008). Trait studies are the shakiest approach to the study of leaders, though also the most common (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Behavioral studies have identified some common areas associated with effectiveness, such as building a common vision, communication skills, and ability to fundraise. This type of research is exemplified by American Association of Community Colleges leadership competencies, which identified the following key areas: organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism. Studies of the AACC competencies have found that they are considered important across community college stakeholder groups in different states and different types of community colleges. According to Hassan, Dellow, & Jackson (2009), these findings suggest the reliability but not the validity of these competencies. More robust studies of situational leadership, learning and cognition, complexity, power and influence, or cultural leadership found across other professions and of leaders in other sectors are rare (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006).
Studies of effectiveness are based on perceptual standards of stakeholders and not on any defined organizational outcomes. Many studies are based on nominations of individuals considered outstanding or effective leaders and then suggest that those individuals’ traits or behaviors make an effective leader (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Many studies are done on with limited views of a president’s effectiveness without any external criterion to mark or judge against, such as earning the LMAA (Bonner, 2013; Boswell & Imoz, 2013; Duree, 2007; Fox, 2008; Klempin & Karp, 2015; Konovalov & Teahen, 2013; Lee, 2009; Lick, 2002; McArdle, 2012). A recent trend is to examine highly successful colleges and then examine the leadership practices within these institutions as a way to understand presidential effectiveness (Kimmens, 2014).

Birnbaum (1992), leading the Institutional Leadership Project (ILP), examined the presidency at 32 institutions of higher education focusing on cognition, or the ways leaders think, such as their cognitive frames, strategy, and implicit leadership theories that can lead to change. The study examined an extensive set of issues from a cultural perspective and identified how effective leadership varies in relationship to the campus context and environment, relationships among groups, and campus history. The study identified systems thinking though mostly focused internally and not on the larger ecosystem that includes external stakeholders as critical to campus leadership. The frames contain competencies such as human resource management, strategy and communication, and are placed in a view of the campus as a complex system. The framework also brings in institutional politics and culture, which are often missing from competency and skill-based lists. This study also identified that a key role of the CEO is to help shape a particular culture on campus that supports the mission and work that is done (Birnbaum,
Kimmens (2014) found the CEOs work in shaping culture was the most significant way to create an effective campus.

Using a case study approach, Cornelius (2013) applied Lewin’s three-step change model (unfreezing, moving, and refreezing) as a theoretical framework to investigate the acceptance and implementation of ATD’s principles at two community colleges. The study indicated that these institutions used data to inform decision making and that the college president was an essential factor in promoting a culture of change. However, the study offered limited insight into the role of the CEO in this process. Likewise, Lebile (2012), also using a case study methodology, ascertained what leadership practices were used to increase student success at two ATD leader colleges. Findings from the study indicated that the CEO leading with passion is a critical component of successful institutional change, yet the results were limited in the depth to which this role was explored.

In contrast, Boyd and Bright (2007) found that utilization of an appreciative inquiry model is tied closely to the role of the CEO. They described a positive and strengths-based theory for leading change contrasted against Lewin’s model and concluded that insights from Kotter’s (1996, 2006) work make a strong case for the role of the CEO. Similarly, Erwin (2009), using a case study methodology, examined a hospital’s movement from fiscal ruin to financial vitality. The study also critiqued the relevance of change theories espoused by Lewin (1947). Kotter (1996) and Schein (1985) found that committed leadership is essential for leading the organization successfully through the anxiety and pain of change. Fullan (2001) presented the case for the effective CEO cultivating leadership at all levels of an organization to face the problems for which there are no simple solutions. Senge (2006) and Senge, Jaworski, Scharmer,
and Flowers (2004) emphasized the need of the CEO to sense and actualize emerging opportunities and concluded that the most important tool for leading twenty-first-century change is the leader’s self. Several reports and studies have singled out the essentiality of the college CEO as change agent.

**Summary**

This section has offered a review of literature which addresses the research question in this study: What leadership practices were evident in CEOs’ actions that helped move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA-award winners? Four themes related to leadership and change emerged from the literature. The first is that systems thinking is a vital trait for today’s community college leaders if they are to enact the systemic changes needed. The second theme is that leadership practices inherent in systematic change are the following: having an abundance mindset, taking risks and supporting followers, being collaborative, being principle-centered, being able to move fluidly within a multidimensional leadership model, sensemaking and sensegiving, creating a sense of leader’s knowledge of self, and having the ability to develop trust. The third theme is the processes which leaders must foster which are endemic to institutional change. The fourth theme was that college CEOs are essential agents in promoting a culture of change.

A significant gap in the literature exists at the nexus of these themes as they pertain to CEOs leading community colleges through the level of systemic change, which results in measurable increases in student success necessary to reach leader-college status within the ATD network and to be granted the LMAA. An opportunity exists for an in-depth multiple case-studies approach based on an inquiry into practices exhibited by CEOs of ATD leader colleges to change their institutions.
Chapter III: Design of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what role chief executive officers (CEOs) play in significant change in student outcomes as defined by the Achieving the Dream (ATD) national community college reform network’s stated objectives of creating a culture of evidence, raising retention and completion rates, and closing achievement gaps within community colleges. The study attempted to identify the leadership practices of CEOs which have contributed to significant movement in ATD's five key indicators: (a) increase retention rates, (b) increase precollege course completion rates, (c) increase completion rates of initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English, (d) increase college-level course completion, and (e) increase credential attainment. The colleges included in the study have met the highest standards set by ATD for institutional change and measurable positive movement in student outcomes.

The first criterion for inclusion in this study is that the colleges have been awarded leader college status within the ATD network, indicating meaningful movement on ATD’s five key indicators at an institutional scale. Of the over 220 ATD colleges nationwide, slightly fewer than 100 have achieved leader college status. The second criterion for inclusion in this study was receipt of the ATD Leah Meyer Austin Award (LMAA). This award annually recognizes an ATD institution that has demonstrated outstanding progress in achieving organizational and cultural change in pursuit of a student success vision that integrates all its individual efforts into a cohesive strategy. Twelve colleges thus far have been awarded the LMAA. This qualitative study will aid future leaders in adopting effective leadership practices that will help to move more ATD and non-ATD colleges to more quickly and effectively increase student retention and
completion and reduce achievement gaps within the context of the student completion agenda. The colleges included here have quantifiably documented improvements in student outcomes as defined by ATD. This study attempted to identify leadership practices formative to this level of institutional change.

In this chapter, I describe the methodological approach and research design. Additionally, a description of participants, the sample selection, data collection, and data analysis are discussed. The research design includes the description of the methods used in this study, the relevance of the methods, and strengths and weaknesses. The data sources and description of data describe the goals of purposeful sampling with a description of the participants in the study. This includes the type of study conducted and the criteria of participants selected for the study. Data collection and procedures include a description of the data collection instruments and steps I used for data collection. Data analysis includes coding, reliability, respondent validation, and triangulation (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards & Richards, 1994, 1998).

The research used a multiple case study approach and examined leadership practices used to increase student success through sustained innovations at three ATD LMAA-winning colleges. The study sought the perspectives of the college CEO, core team leader, and ATD leadership coach about leadership practices that contributed to an environment in which there was a measurable increase in student success. An additional source of data was available documentation of these efforts on ATD’s LMAA website. While we know much about the overarching strategies within ATD, and the process of institutional change has a rich tradition in the academic literature, no study to date has attempted to identify what leadership practices are
common to colleges crossing the significant threshold of change that brings them to be ATD leader colleges and LMAA-winning colleges.

To determine the leadership practices operating within a framework of living systems theory at selected ATD leader and LMAA-winning colleges, I employed a qualitative multiple case study approach (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). Three colleges out of the twelve LMAA colleges were selected. The colleges were selected by starting with the most recent colleges to win the LMAA and working backward through the list of winners until three CEOs had committed their colleges to the study. Leader colleges and LMAA winners have documented success in changing institutional outcomes at an institutional scale. This study focused on individual experiences from their perspective. The study was exploratory and included interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) defined qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world of the participant, making the world visible through field-notes, interviews, focus groups, documentation reviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self” (p. 3). Ritchie and Lewis (2006) stated that qualitative research offers (a) comprehensive knowledge about the social world of research participants, including their experiences, perceptions, and past, (b) samples that are small, with purposeful criteria, (c) a data collection process consisting of close interaction between researcher and participant, (d) data that are very thorough, in depth, and broad, (e) an expansive analysis, which could lead to the development of new explanations, and (f) results centering on the participants’ interpretations of their social worlds. Qualitative research requires learning to listen, interpret, and tell someone else’s story (Glesne, 2006; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mays & Pope, 2000; Patton, 1990). Merriam (2009) stated that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they
attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Understanding participants’ perceptions of the leadership practices which lead to significant institutional change within the context of ATD and the larger completion agenda adds to our knowledge of how meaningful institutional change occurs.

**Positionality**

Qualitative researchers must understand that they bring their own values, assumptions, and expectations to the study that can be difficult to detach at times (Willis, 2007). One potential bias that I bring to this research project is having served as an ATD core team leader who has worked closely with an effective ATD leader college CEO at a college that won the LMAA in 2017. I also led the team that wrote the application for the LMAA for my college. This bias could have potentially led to unintended comparisons of my experience as a core team leader with the practices of the CEOs I was attempting to learn about. At the same time, familiarity with the processes and challenges inherent in institutional change within the ATD framework informed and strengthened my position epistemologically, allowing for knowledge and insights that might not otherwise have been possible. Examples of this knowledge include being empowered to lead institutional change work by my CEO and in turn empowering others to lead over forty interventions which have to date resulted in a 10% increase in fall-to-winter retention, a 19% increase in fall-to-fall retention, an 87% increase in three-year graduation rates, all of this change happening in just a 6-year period at my college. These changes would not have been possible at my college without a shift from equilibrium to disequilibrium, which happened by painting a clear picture utilizing institutional data that showed that most students were not reaching their stated goals of attaining degrees. This shift to disequilibrium was acted on by empowering faculty and staff to conceive of and implement the necessary changes, accompanied by significant realignment of resources.
Research Question

This study addressed the following research question: What leadership practices were evident in CEOs’ actions that helped move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA winners? Little research has thus far addressed this important question within the context of the completion agenda and ATD’s efforts. No study has yet investigated leadership at LMAA-winning schools. So far, no research has addressed these questions through the theoretical lens of systems theory, which will shed light on the complex task of leading meaningful institutional change in higher education.

Philosophical Approach

Two key practitioners in the use of case studies methodology are Robert Stake (1995) and Robert Yin (2006). Both approach case study from a constructivist paradigm. A constructivist perspective asserts that truth is relative to one’s perspective (Dukes, 1984). Constructivism “recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn’t reject completely some notion of objectivity. Pluralism, not relativism, is stressed with focus on the circular dynamic tension of subject and object” (Miller & Crabtree, 1999, p. 10). A social production of reality is central to the constructivist paradigm (Searle, 1995). The constructivist approach to case study holds the advantage of allowing close collaboration between researcher and participant, allowing participants to tell their unique stories (Miller & Crabtree, 1999). By telling their stories to researchers utilizing case studies methodologies, participants can describe how they see reality (Lather, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993); from this I better understood the participants’ actions.
The philosophical approach is also informed by living systems theory. Epistemologically, living systems theory offers a useful framework for understanding how community colleges function and how they interact with the larger suprasystem in which they are nested. Living systems theory offers a common language and conceptual framework for understanding the necessity of disequilibrium to inspire the college’s collective effort to adapt to external demands. In addition to offering common language, living systems theory also offers insight into the necessary leadership practices that can be most effectively applied as a catalyst of change through the mechanisms of ATD.

Due to the size and complexity of systems such as community colleges and the large number of policies and practices that must be altered to make effective systemic change, CEOs must rely on a distributed leadership model. The executive team, deans, directors, chairs, faculty, and staff must be empowered to lead the research and recommend the implementation of interventions that will alter existing practice and policy (Kezar, 2013; O’Banion, 2012; Wheatley, 2001; Youngblood, 1998). It is important for all college members’ knowledge of the system to be utilized; specialized knowledge is crucial to the goal of achieving internal integration and subsequent change. A distributed leadership model helps shorten feedback loops and elicits buy-in from all constituencies (Kezar, 2014). This enables not just good decision making but sensemaking and ownership of change throughout the institution (Kezar & Lester, 2011). It is from this philosophic position that the practices of ATD leader college CEOs were studied (Katz, 1997).
Guiding Theoretical Perspective

Living systems theory emphasizes that systems, like ecosystems, do not function as hierarchical structures (Capra, 1996). All components of a system are vital to its function, each individual having inherent value in the functioning of the whole. That said, individuals do play unique roles within living systems (Youngblood, 1998). Each unique role plays an important part in creating effective systemic change. A keystone role in any process of change within an institution is that occupied by the senior leader. It is the role of the CEO to set the stage and to provide the vision of what must change and why, and what is required of the system for continued external integration. ATD’s intention is to help leaders paint this picture for their colleges (Burke, 2014; MDRC, 2014). Systems thinking is a vital trait for today’s community college leaders if they are to enact the systemic changes needed for the system to grow and thrive (Bereiter, 2002; Birnbaum, 1988; Bridgeforth, 2005; Davis, 2013; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007; Wheatley, 2001).

Methodological Approach

The probing nature of qualitative research can elicit some very powerful and moving responses (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Willis, 2007). Therefore, this study was conducted using a multiple case study design. A case study is a form of qualitative observation that studies a specific phenomenon such as a program, event, person, process, institution, or social group (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Willis, 2007). A case study as described by Creswell (2009) is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in detail a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Case studies are normally used with qualitative designs in which there is a
strong effort to understand a single unit of study in a complex context (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In case studies, information is collected over time using a variety of data collection methods. Willis (2007) asserted that case studies also include specific characterizations; they (a) focus on a specific context; (b) relate to real people and situations; (c) include broad, comprehensive data from observations, interviews, and document sources; (d) depend on inductive reasoning; and (e) help clarify meaning about the study. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2006), the principal characteristic of a case study is that it offers multiple perspectives and is rooted in a particular context that is critical to understanding the phenomena being examined. The study may involve a single case but usually involves multiple cases in applied research. The goal of case studies is to obtain an extensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. For this study, a single case is one college (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In this instance, I used multiple case studies to obtain multiple perspectives on the practices of leadership at ATD LMAA-winning colleges. In case studies, according to Willis (2007), interviews become the primary source of data collected. Case study methodology allowed me, in this instance, to gain insight into the leadership practices that have resulted in significant institutional change.

Data Sources and Description of Data

A purposeful sampling strategy was used for this study. Purposeful sampling possesses certain characteristics that enable detailed understanding of the themes I wished to study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Maxwell (2005) suggested that purposeful sampling has four goals:

1. To achieve representativeness of the settings, individuals, or activities selected
2. To adequately capture the heterogeneity in the population

3. To deliberately examine cases critical for the themes

4. To establish particular comparisons to illustrate reasons for differences between settings and individuals. (pp. 89-90)

This study required two levels of sample selection. The first was to identify the community colleges to be included in the study. The selection criteria was colleges that have been recognized as ATD leader colleges who have been singled out for documented increased student success as demonstrated by selection as LMAA winners. Recruitment began with the most recent LMAA winner and work backward in time through the list of winners. This process would allow for the most recent examples of successful institutional change at community colleges to be used. A sample size of three colleges was used to allow for a degree of triangulation regarding the leadership practices utilized. Recruitment occurred until the sample size was reached. The sample size did not exceed three colleges. To accomplish this process, the CEO’s office and the ATD leadership coaches of each of the LMAA colleges were contacted by email and were invited to participate in the study.

The second level of sample selection was to identify the individual participants and to be driven by the first selection criteria. The participants who were selected for the study were the CEO, ATD core team leader, and the college’s ATD leadership coach. All three needed to participate in order to provide the desired triangulation for this study as outlined below. All interviews took place via Skype and were captured as MP4 files using Panopto screen capture software, as the twelve LMAA-winning colleges are scattered across the country, making in-
person interviews difficult and impractical. An additional rationale for using Skype was to increase my ability to fit into the busy schedules of CEOs who are among the most successful within the context of the completion agenda. An additional data source came from an analysis of existing documentation, available on ATD’s LMAA website, to verify and ground the data gathered in the interviews for each college. I requested assistance from the community college CEOs’ executive assistants to arrange times to interview the CEOs, core team leaders, and leadership coaches.

Chief Executive Officer

The CEO from each institution was interviewed by Skype as part of this study. The CEO’s role in ATD is to actively commit to and support student success efforts by developing strategies that will improve student retention and completion, while working to close achievement gaps between ATD-identified demographic groups. The CEO also demonstrates a willingness to support policy changes and reallocate resources to improve student success (ATD, 2016). The CEOs selected were those that served at their respective institutions during the period in which leader college status and the LMAA was achieved. If a CEO was currently at another institution, the site was eligible as long as the CEO was willing to participate.

Core Team Leader

As part of this study, a core team leader from each institution was interviewed via Skype. As suggested to each college by ATD, the core team leaders were from one to three individuals at each college who served as organizers and facilitators in identifying and moving ATD-priority areas and resulting interventions forward. Core team leaders selected were those that served at
their respective institutions during the period in which leader college status and the LMAA was achieved. If a core team leader was currently at another institution, the site was eligible as long as the core team leader was willing to participate.

**ATD Leadership Coach**

In order to assist ATD colleges in achieving increased levels of student success, each college is assigned two coaches--a leadership coach and a data coach. The leadership coach assigned to each college was interviewed regarding the leadership of the CEO throughout the ATD process. The coaches were interviewed by Skype. Most ATD leadership coaches are retired community college presidents and therefore offer a unique perspective on the leadership practices of CEOs. The leadership coach assists and supports the college in determining effective strategies to improve student success. The data coach helps the college in collecting and analyzing data. Data coaches are often individuals who have served as institutional researchers and or vice presidents at ATD colleges. (ATD, 2016). The coach of interest for this study was the leadership coach, as leadership practices are the phenomena of interest.

**Analyses of Data**

Data collection occurred using qualitative research methods and techniques, including interviews and document review. Data collection was conducted during April and May of 2017. Three study sites and nine participants participated in the study: three community college CEOs, three core team leaders, and three leadership coaches. All of the participants met the criterion of having been associated with their respective community colleges during the period of time leading up to becoming a leader college.
Interviews

According to Glesne (2006), “Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding” (p. 81). Although there is a relationship between the research questions and the interview questions, interview questions are more specific than research questions (Glesne, 2006). Interviews have a specific purpose, and the subject of discussion is mentioned in advance (Dyer, 1995). All interviews took place via Skype. The participants gave verbal consent at the beginning of their Skype interviews after reviewing consent documents with me (see Appendix A). I used an interview guide that I developed based on the research question to conduct the interviews (Turner, 2010). Through the use of interviews, I was able to explore each individual’s understanding of leadership practices that were used to improve student outcomes at the institutional level. All of the interviews were recorded, both video and audio via Panopto screen capture software. Additionally, I constructed field notes. The interviews ranged in length from just over 30 minutes to over 90 minutes. An experienced transcriber, Rev.com, was employed to transcribe the interviews.

I asked the participants questions designed to gather data about the CEOs’ leadership practices that helped to improve student outcomes. They were also asked about the meaning of committed leadership and to describe any possible challenges they experienced during the time the institution was implementing interventions that led to change. The questions were intended to ascertain how leadership practices of CEOs contributed to significant institutional improvement through a systems theory theoretical lens.
The three community college CEOs, three leadership coaches, and three core team leaders were initially contacted through email (see Appendix B) to ascertain their interest in being interviewed. The email introduced them to the study and its purpose. It explained that they were being invited to participate because their institutions are ATD leader colleges and Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges. This initial email provided each CEO, leadership coach, and core team leader instructions regarding their participation in the study. The email included a very brief background of myself and a timeline of when I would contact them again regarding specific dates for scheduling the interview call, should they agree to participate. The CEO, leadership coach, and core team leader were informed that I would be conducting the interviews via Skype.

Rapport was established at the beginning of the interview with a discussion about each CEO’s background and through the collection of general information about their colleges. All interviews followed the steps outlined by Turner (2010). The specific steps included the following:

1. Explain the purpose of the interview.

2. Review terms of confidentiality and get verbal consent to participate in the study.

3. Review the format of the interview.

4. Describe the length of the interview.

5. Provide details on how each interviewee could contact the researcher.
6. Ask each interviewee if he or she has any questions before the interview starts.

7. Inform each college CEO, leadership coach, and core team leader that the interview will be recorded.

8. Describe to the participants how the results of the study would be shared.

The interviews ended with a final question to summarize the interview in an open-ended manner. I extended final salutations, thanking the interviewees for their time, responses, and thoughtfulness in participating. I also offered, upon completion of the study, to forward the study findings to the interviewees. Questions were worded for responses to be structured in an open-ended way. This semi-structured interview format allowed the interviewees to contribute as much detailed information as they would like and allowed me to ask follow-up, probing questions to get clarification (Turner, 2010). Appendix C includes the questions that were asked during the interviews with the CEOs, leadership coaches, and core team leaders.

**Pilot Test**

I conducted a pilot test of the interview within my home institution as a way to troubleshoot any potential problems and prepare for the actual interviews. An interview with a community college administrator tested the format and length of the interview questions. I used the information from this pilot interview to change and refine the interview protocol.
Interview Memos Highlights

The use of memo writing as part of analysis for a qualitative study provided me with an additional lens to clarify and magnify the data, generate ideas, and inform the coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). After each interview concluded, I captured impressions from listening to the interview before the transcription process. This initial response to the data provided insight to potential biases. I observed the subtleties of how each participant responded to the questions and the impact of the interview on him or her. Writing memos after reviewing each interview helped capture the unique characters of the participants as well as their familiarity with the relevant leadership practices.

Document Review

The multiple cases methodology used employed document analysis as part of the data triangulation process (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989). Documents that record shifts in resources, implemented practices, policy changes, and organizational changes helped explain practices that lead to sustained student success. All documents used were publicly available on ATD’s website. Documents reviewed for content and support validated the accuracy of information gathered in the interviews. Review of documents took place prior to the interviews. Review of these documents generated additional questions to be asked during the interviews, including enabling shifts in resources, implementation modifications, discontinued interventions, obstacles faced while implementing interventions, evaluation of interventions, progress scale for interventions, professional development offered, and policy changes.
Documents provide valuable information, as they serve as a source of (a) information about practices and initiatives used at the institutions to improve student success, (b) information about the background of processes, and (c) a source of deeper understanding of what will be revealed in the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2006). Documents were used to triangulate the statements from interviews about improved student success.

**Coding Process and Data Analysis**

The data analysis was inductive and was completed using a coding system. Coding is the main strategy for categorizing data in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005). The goal of coding in qualitative research is not to count things as in quantitative research but instead to break up the data and categorize them to facilitate comparison between things in the same category and organize data into broader themes (Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Richards & Richards, 1994, 1998). Qualitative coding methods suggested by Glesne (2006) were used for this study. According to Glesne (2006), coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining those scraps of collected data (p. 152). She suggested the following steps: (a) Create an organizational framework by putting similar pieces together into data clumps; (b) Develop major code clumps in order to sort the data; (c) Code the contents of each clump, breaking it down into subcodes; and (d) Place the various data clumps into themes (p. 152). I used all four steps to create codes and themes.

Qualitative studies require decisions about how the analysis will be conducted. The decision should inform the rest of the design (Maxwell, 2005). The analysis process involves making sense out of the data from what the researcher has seen, heard, and read (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2006). Analysis is incessant and repetitive to enable the researcher to manage the data
and make sense of the evidence (Creswell, 2009; Ritchie & Lewis, 2006). It involves collecting open-ended data based on asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by the participants (Creswell, 2009).

The first step in analyzing data was to have the interviews transcribed. After reading through transcripts and field notes repetitively, the initial codes came from the study’s problem statement, from the research question, from the living systems theory theoretical framework, and from my general impressions after listening to and reading the nine interviews (Richards & Richards, 1998). I performed a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data to identify categories from the coding, which was then used to develop themes; this process assisted in answering the study’s research question and in forming an understanding of the central phenomenon being explored. Systems theory provided a framework for the analysis along with the incorporation of the research discovered in the literature review. Saldana (2013) defined themes not as something that is coded, but instead as an outcome of the reflective analysis, categorization, and coding of the data set. Saldana noted that the exact definition and function within a study’s analysis varies among researcher technique sources, but it serves to identify what a unit of data means and describes an extended sentence or phrase. Corbin and Strauss (2015) provided guidance on the analysis of data for a qualitative study using a term of “constant comparisons” (p. 7) that involves breaking down the data into pieces to look for similarities and differences, in this case across the three colleges. By grouping the similar data sets, categories naturally appeared that assisted with the creation of themes. The results of this analysis appear in Chapter Four of this study. From this process a list of emergent patterns that reveal relationships was recorded. Field notes and documents were also compared to develop categories related to the study. Groups of data were labeled and highlighted using NVivo software in order to establish themes.
In the next step, I compared the groups of data and developed primary categories. I used the themes that emerged during the literature review as the initial coding themes. Saldana’s (2013) first cycling methods of Descriptive Coding, In NVivo Coding, and Initial Coding described the methods utilized for the first pass at coding. The themes that emerged from the review of literature are the following:

1. Systems thinking is a vital approach for today’s community college leaders if they are to enact the systemic changes needed within the system.

2. Leadership practices inherent to systematic change are the following: having an abundance mindset, risk taking, supporting followers, being collaborative, being principle-centered, being able to move fluidly within a multidimensional leadership model, sensemaking and sensegiving, creating a sense of urgency, leader’s knowledge of self, and ability to develop trust.

3. Leaders must foster certain practices that are endemic to institutional change.

4. Since they are the nominal leaders of the colleges, college CEOs are essential agents in promoting a culture of change.

Descriptive coding is topical and provided insight into what was heard in the course of the interviews. Strauss (1987) called initial coding “open coding” and described it as a coding process that is unrestricted, often involving line-by-line analysis that results in concepts that fit the data. After completing the first coding cycle, it was evident that a second coding cycle needed to take place. The coding needed to provide a mechanism for truly “listening” for the undertones of what was being said both literally and subtly. Saldana (2013) stated that the goal of focused coding as a second coding analytic process is to allow for the development of
categories with focus on their individual properties and taxonomy. With focused coding, the
development of themes and categories should not be forced to fit a preconceived set of codes.
As a result of this, the second coding of the transcripts from the interviewees was organic,
free form, and without boundaries. This led to a deeper and more descriptive coding process
that eased the way for the development of themes. The themes that emerged in the second
coding cycle are the following:

1. Communication of the importance of improving student outcomes to the college
   community
2. Commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision
   making
3. Empowerment by the CEO of college personnel to lead institutional change efforts
4. Clear emphasis on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to their
   communities
5. Significant financial commitment to ATD efforts.

**Methods to Ensure Trustworthiness**

Reliability is the degree to which the study can be duplicated or replicated (Ritchie &
Lewis, 2006; Roberts, 2004). In order to determine reliability, I documented the procedures for
the case studies. Creswell (2009) suggested qualitative researchers follow the two important
steps to ensure reliability: Check transcripts to make sure they do not contain mistakes, and make
sure the definitions of the codes are understood.

Validity of data refers to whether the data are correct or not (Ritchie & Lewis, 2006).
Validity asks if the data can be trusted (Roberts, 2004). Validity is the strength of qualitative
research, the findings dependent on the viewpoints of the researcher, the participant, and the readers of the account. I used respondent validation, triangulation, and member check to enhance validity and accuracy (Creswell, 2009; Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989). Using multiple sites for the research increases the trustworthiness of the themes (Glesne, 2006).

Respondent validation ensures that conversations are not misinterpreted. According to Maxwell (2005), respondent validation is the most important way to avoid misinterpreting the meaning and perspective of what interviewees say. Validation involves seeking feedback from the participants about data and conclusions drawn from the discourses. I reviewed transcripts to ensure validity.

Triangulation is the process of collecting information from multiple sources to reduce the risk of bias (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989; Maxwell, 2005). I used a combination of interviews, documentation reviews, and member checks to improve validity and reliability while reducing the risk of researcher bias. Member check enhanced validity by allowing me to send the final report or themes back to the participant to determine accuracy. In this study, I emailed the themes to the participants for their feedback.

**Limitations**

The limited number of cases used (three of twelve possible) is one potential limitation of this exploratory study. A further limitation of this study is that it focuses primarily on only one of the seven interrelated ATD capacities, Leadership & Vision. An opportunity for further scholarly inquiry would be a comprehensive look at one other or all seven ATD capacities and their roles in moving colleges to higher levels of student retention and completion as exemplified by achieving leader college status and being LMAA winners. Other areas of potential focus for
further scholarly research would be to look at the role played by college trustees, core team leaders, mid-level administrators, and/or faculty.

**Strategies to Protect Human Subjects**

Careful consideration for the protection of human subjects was undertaken throughout this study. I completed an online training course on the Protection of Human Research Subjects through Oregon State University. This training outlined specific strategies for protecting subjects of a research study. Upon verification that has met their requirements for ethical research, The Oregon State University’s Institutional Review Board approved this study. Interview and other data collected throughout this study is kept confidential and in a secure location. Participant-identifying information I kept separate from research data. Additionally, informed consent was recorded as part of the Skype interviews from each participant. Finally, all Institutional Review Board requirements and policies for individual participants were followed.

**Summary of Design of Study**

A qualitative case study research method was applied through a living systems theory lens to conduct interviews and analyze documents in an exploratory study. This allowed me to examine leadership practices made evident by CEOs in the process of becoming ATD leaders and LMAA-winning colleges. The purpose of Chapter Three is to provide a detailed description of the design and procedures that were used to conduct the study. A qualitative research method was used to conduct interviews and review documents to gain insight and an understanding of leadership practices employed to increase student success through sustained innovation.
Chapter IV: Findings

This qualitative, multi-case study investigated leadership practices used to increase student success through sustaining innovation at three Achieving the Dream leader colleges resulting in the winning of the annual LMAA. This chapter presents the research findings from the responses of CEOs, ATD core team leaders, and ATD leadership coaches concerning leadership practices that led to improved student success.

The purpose of this study was to determine what role chief executive officers (CEOs) play in significant change in student outcomes as defined by the Achieving the Dream (ATD) national community college reform network’s stated objectives of creating a culture of evidence, raising retention and completion rates, and closing achievement gaps within community colleges. The study identified leadership practices of CEOs evident at colleges that have seen significant movement in ATD's five key indicators: (a) increase retention rates, (b) increase precollege course completion rates, (c) increase completion rates of initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English, (d) increase college-level course completion, and (e) increase credential attainment. Colleges included in this study have been awarded leader-college status within the ATD network, indicating meaningful movement on ATD’s five key indicators at an institutional scale. The second criteria for inclusion in this study was receipt of the ATD Leah Meyer Austin Award (LMAA). Living systems theory was used to develop an open-ended research question: What leadership practices were evident in CEOs’ actions that helped move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA winners?
Theoretical Framework

Living systems theory served as a guide for the creation of the open-ended interview questions and facilitated the narrative analysis of the data. Living systems theory emphasizes that systems, like ecosystems, do not function as hierarchical structures (Capra, 1996). All components of a system are vital to its function, each individual having inherent value in the functioning of the whole. That said, individuals do play unique roles within living systems (Youngblood, 1998). Each unique role plays an important part in creating effective systemic change. A keystone role in any process of change within an institution is that occupied by the senior leader. It is the role of the CEO to set the stage and to provide the vision of what must change and why, and what is required of the system for continued external integration. ATD’s intention is to help leaders paint this picture for their colleges (Burke, 2014; MDRC, 2014). Systems thinking is a vital trait for today’s community college leaders if they are to enact the systemic changes needed for the system to grow and thrive (Bereiter, 2002; Birnbaum, 1988; Bridgeforth, 2005; Davis, 2013; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007; Wheatley, 2001).

The Data Collection Sites

Data was collected via Skype interviews of the CEO, core team leader, and leadership coach at the three recent LMAA-winning colleges. The LMAA annually recognizes an Achieving the Dream Institution that has demonstrated outstanding progress in designing a student-focused culture that permeates all levels and structures of the organization. Successful institutions pursue a cohesive strategy comprising aligned whole-college solutions that support and promote the success of all their students, resulting in significant and sustainable institutional improvement. They take bold action to design policies, processes, and programs that reinforce each other to achieve the institution’s student success and equity goals. Winners have dynamic
and committed leaders who cultivate a culture of evidence, develop policies and practices that empower faculty and staff to lead and engage in the work, and pay particularly close attention to the needs of underrepresented and underserved students by tracking disaggregated longitudinal cohort data.

The Interviews

The three community college CEOs who committed themselves, their core team leaders, and leadership coaches to participate came from colleges that varied in situation and size. All participants were in their respective positions at the time their college won the LMAA. Those invited to participate were sent the interview questions and consent form text along with the recruitment email. At the start of each interview, I asked participants to read the consent form in my presence and to verbally agree to have the Skype interview recorded. All agreed to be recorded and were supportive of the study. Participants were informed that they would be asked the questions and there would not be a dialogue with me; however, I would ask follow-up questions for clarification and to prompt the interviewee to delve deeper when needed. Each type (CEO, core team leader, leadership coach) of participant was asked the same questions regarding leadership but rephrased according to each participant’s role (See Appendix C).

The Skype interviews, both video and audio, were recorded on a laptop computer using Panopto screen-capturing software. A back-up audio recording was made using the memo device on my cell phone. I took notes during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the recordings were archived on a laptop and external hard drive for security purposes. After each interview, a memo was created in the NVivo software to archive my impressions and
reactions to the interviews. The interview subjects received a thank you email following the interview.

**Analysis Process**

To analyze the data and identify themes and categories, I used the qualitative research type of narrative analysis. Merriam (2009) characterizes narrative analysis as the “study of experience through stories” (p. 202), listening to the stories that people tell and analyzing how they share their experiences. I was able to listen to participants’ responses, knowing that their words were recorded by multiple electronic devices and could therefore capture their emotions, behaviors, and reactions as questions were posed.

After the interviews concluded, the audio recordings were transcribed. The nine MP4 files from the interviews were transcribed by REV.com in under 12 hours into Microsoft Word files and the text imported into NVivo software. The interview data transcribed did not include incidental words such as “So,” “Um,” “Uh,” etc.; all references to institutions’ names as well as city and state names were changed to nondescript pronouns, such as “my” or “another” institution to protect the confidentiality of the interview subjects. Care was taken to transcribe their exact phrasing in order to capture the essence of the interview in the transcripts.

**First Coding Cycle**

Utilizing the tracking features in the NVivo software, a first coding cycle was completed with a list of codes created prior to reviewing the transcript data. These initial codes came from the study’s problem statement, from the research question, from the living systems theory theoretical framework, and from my general impressions after listening to and reading the nine interviews. As part of the first coding cycle, I made memos on what I “heard” along with
specific formative quotes. After studying the results of the first coding cycle I realized a second cycle coding was needed.

**Second Coding Cycle**

During the second coding cycle I read more carefully what each participant was saying for both the literal statements and for what might be the meta-message in the transcribed dataset. Upon review of the transcribed data from all nine interviews, I again used the NVivo software to track the coding and key words and formative quotes from each participant. Post-transcription memos were again created to record my reactions to the interviews.

**Interview Memos Highlights**

The use of memo writing as part of analysis for a qualitative study provided me with an additional lens to clarify and magnify the data, generate ideas, and inform the coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). After each interview concluded, I captured impressions from listening to the interview before the transcription process. This initial response to the data provided insight into potential biases. I observed the subtleties of how each participant responded to the questions and the impact of the interview on him or her. Writing memos after reviewing each interview helped capture the unique characters of the participants as well as their familiarity with the relevant leadership practices. Below are highlights from the memos written after each interview. Coding of the three research sites are coded College 1 to 3. State, city, and county names have been removed to protect anonymity. The coding for the participants is CEO 1 to 3, Core Team Leader 1 to 3, and Leadership Coach 1 to 3. Pronouns were changed to “they” and “their” to protect the confidentiality of the participants. After completing the transcription of each interview, I wrote post-transcription memos.
Category and Theme Development

Once each of the first and second coding cycles was completed, categories were identified from a review of the collected data. Individual code titles were recorded using the NVivo software and were arranged into categories. As a result, the codes were consolidated into logical categories corresponding to, first, the themes revealed during the literature review and, second, to emergent themes. Themes at the end of this chapter illustrate the categories that developed from the analysis of the data after completing the first and second coding cycles.

The living systems theory framework used to create the interview questions was utilized in the review. The interview and all of the transcript data set materials--after forming the categories from the first and second cycle coding exercise--were reviewed once more. The experience of listening to the participants as they shared their thoughts and ideas was synthesized with the research on living systems theory, and as a result of this analysis the five themes were decided upon:

1. The importance of communicating improving student outcomes to the college community
2. Commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision making
3. Empowerment by the CEO of college personnel to lead institutional change efforts
4. Clear emphasis on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to the community
5. Significant financial commitment to ATD efforts
Results

The research question for this study provided a framework to present the results of the narrative analysis of the transcribed data set, the interview, documents, and post-transcription memos. Five themes were derived from the analysis, the categories, coding, and sample responses from the interviewees. References to the interviews are coded once again with pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the individuals. All samples and quotations appear without providing information that would identify the individuals or institutions involved in the study. The quotations presented represent the actual responses by the interviewees to the interview questions and have not been edited for correct grammar. The combination of the categories and related quotations from the interviewees led to the natural development of the themes. When themes were not supported by all nine interviews readily available, documents from ATDs LMAA web site were utilized for additional support.

Participant Profiles

Brief profiles of participating colleges, the CEO, core team leader, and leadership coach are given here to provide context for the themes identified through the interviews and coding process. To protect the anonymity of participants, colleges and individuals are listed numerically, College 1, 2 and 3. The CEO of College 1 is listed in this study as CEO 1. Likewise, the core team leader and leadership coach for College 1 are listed as Core Team Leader 1 and Leadership Coach 1. The same schema is repeated for Colleges 2 and 3.

College 1

College 1 serves more than 40,000 students annually in the suburbs of a large
Midwestern city. The college prepares students for careers and for transfer to four-year universities. College 1 offers associate degree and certification programs, advanced career programs, workforce training, professional development, continuing education classes, accelerated degree options for adults, and developmental education programs.

College 1 received the LMAA after four years of participation in ATD. According to ATD, several student success-driven initiatives contributed to College 1 winning the LMAA; administrators, faculty, and staff committed to creating a culture of cooperation and transparency, combined with operational changes that affected operations, resource allocation, and related policies. College 1’s focus on transforming its culture and operations led to the following results during the period 2010 to 2014:

- Increased graduation rate from 14 percent to 24 percent, according to the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS)
- Improved African-American students' fall-to-spring persistence from 69 percent to 78 percent
- Increased African-American students’ college readiness in math rate from 15 percent to 58 percent
- Raised Hispanic students’ college readiness in math rate from 36 percent to 62 percent
- Improved African-American students’ completion rate for developmental math from 10 percent to 21 percent

**Leadership Coach 1**

Leadership Coach 1 is a former college president, is the managing principal of a higher
education consulting firm, a community college leadership faculty member, and a community college leadership author serving on numerous boards and advisory committees tied to community colleges and the completion agenda.

**Core Team Leader 1**

Core Team Leader 1 currently serves as associate provost at College 1, is a former university and community college faculty member, and has served as core team leader for College 1 for the entire duration of the college’s tenure with Achieving the Dream.

**CEO 1**

CEO 1 began as CEO of College 1 in 2009. Prior to this, CEO 1 served for a decade as CEO of another community college, prior to that holding a variety of leadership positions at community colleges. CEO 1 serves on several national community college boards and is a frequent speaker at national conferences.

**College 2**

College 2 is located in the suburbs of a large metropolitan area on the eastern seaboard. College 2 serves over 65,000 students annually and was formed from six formerly independent colleges. The college prepares students for careers and for transfer to four-year universities. College 2 offers associate degree and certification programs, advanced career programs, workforce training, professional development, continuing education classes, and an accelerated degree option.
An intensive analysis of student success data by faculty, staff, and administrators led College 2 to understand that all students needed more guidance; developmental students were not reaching credit courses because of between-semester attrition; financial challenges were making students lose momentum toward completion, and faculty felt challenged teaching diverse populations. The college responded by implementing comprehensive reforms for adults and developmental education programs. This effort lead to significant improvement in student outcomes including the following:

- Course success and retention rates were higher on average for African-American students in participating in college success cohorts than for all other African-American students.
- Accelerated developmental education students accumulated credits at higher rates than students in traditional developmental writing courses.
- Accelerated developmental education students completed the gateway course English 101 at higher rates than students in traditional developmental education courses.
- Students completing college success courses have higher fall-to-fall retention rates than students who fail to complete or are exempt from the course, with the same being true for fall-to-spring retention.
- From 2010 to 2014, College 2 has increased certificate and degree completion by 55 percent.
Leadership Coach 2

Leadership Coach 2 is not currently serving as leadership coach for College 2 but was in the years leading up to College 2’s winning of the LMAA. Leadership Coach 2 is a former college president, university administrator, and corporate executive who currently consults with many institutions within higher education to help improve their student retention and graduation rates, particularly for low-income students and students of color, serving on numerous boards and advisory committees tied to community colleges and the completion agenda.

Core Team Leader 2

Core Team Leader 2 currently serves as vice president of instruction at College 2, has served at the executive level at several community colleges, and has served as core team leader for College 2 for the entire duration of the college’s tenure with Achieving the Dream.

CEO 2

CEO 2 began as CEO of College 2 in 2005. Prior to this, CEO 2 served for a decade as CEO of another community college, prior to that holding a variety of leadership positions at community colleges and spent 22 years as a faculty member. CEO 2 serves on several national community college boards and is a frequent speaker at national conferences and an author.
College 3

College 3 is located in the rural south and serves roughly 2900 students annually. The college prepares students for careers and for transfer to four-year universities. College 3 offers associate degree and certification programs, advanced career programs, workforce training, professional development, continuing education classes, and an accelerated degree option.

College 3 joined ATD at its inception in 2004. College 3’s participation in ATD has transformed the college and dramatically altered the way it educates students, resulting in the following increases in student success:

- Cooperative learning training reached almost 100 percent of the target population.
- Instructors trained in cooperative learning have higher student pass rates after the training.
- Completion and transfer rates within three years have more than doubled across all student groups, including low-income and African-American students.
- Gateway English completion rates have increased across all student groups and nearly doubled for Pell recipients.
- The gap between African-American students and white students has closed by 10 percentage points.
- Developmental mathematics and English completion rates have increased across all student groups.
Leadership Coach 3

Leadership Coach 3 is not currently serving as leadership coach for College 3 but was in the years leading up to College 3’s winning of the LMAA. Leadership Coach 3 is a former college president, chaired a community college leadership doctoral program, helped develop community college systems abroad, and serves on numerous boards and advisory committees tied to community colleges and the completion agenda.

Core Team Leader 3

Core Team Leader 3 served as a faculty member, dean, and currently vice president for institutional advancement and campus life and has served as core team leader for College 3 for the entire duration of the college’s tenure with Achieving the Dream.

CEO 3

CEO 3 began as CEO of College 3 in 2012. Prior to this CEO 3 worked in private industry and economic development.
Research Findings

Review of the interview transcript and supporting documents led to the emergence of the following themes composed of multiple specific practices of CEOs at LMAA colleges: (a) communicating the importance of improving student outcomes to the college community, (b) commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision making, (c) empowerment by the CEO of college personnel to lead institutional change efforts, (d) clear emphasis on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to their communities, (e) significant financial commitment to ATD efforts.

Through interviews and a review of relevant documentation, the researcher provided a description and analysis of practices of CEOs that were used to increase student success through sustaining innovation at three ATD LMAA colleges. Individual interviews consisted of CEO, ATD core team leader, and ATD leadership coach. The findings of the research question are presented below followed by the theme and findings from interviews. The findings from the study will be supported and illustrated by rich descriptions provided by the participants in the study.

Theme One: Communicating the Importance of Improving Student Outcomes to the College Community

Theme One: communicating the importance of improving student outcomes to the college community clearly emerges as one of the key practices of all three CEOs of successful LMAA-winning colleges. All three CEOs signal through verbal and written communication the link between organizational resources and a positive impact on student outcomes. Evidence of this is present in all nine interviews and is presented below in detail arranged by college.
Leadership Coach 1

Leadership Coach 1 stated that from the time CEO 1 first entered the college, CEO 1’s vision was to refocus the college on student success and to that end CEO 1 saw the college’s participation in ATD as a means to that end. However, CEO 1 did not limit input on strategies to increase student success to only ATD but included input from completion by design and other initiatives. Even with efforts to secure external funding, the message was clearly communicated by the CEO that the purpose was to increase some aspect of student success.

I think from the very beginning, when CEO 1 entered the college CEO 1, launched CEO 1’s leadership vision around student success. That was very clear when CEO 1 first got started that CEO 1 was gonna focus on student success and to that end CEO 1 saw Achieving the Dream with CEO 1’s primary focus being on student success a major strategy. CEO 1 always saw it as a strategy to help promote student success as an institutional strategy for doing that. CEO 1 continued to look for different ways that CEO 1 could find approaches to promote student success be it through looking at what was going on with or what was going on with completion by design or other areas. Even when they sought additional external funding, that funding was directed toward some aspect of student success.

Leadership Coach 1 stated repeatedly that CEO 1 helped the college focus on a key set of priorities that would enable College 1 to increase student success. According to Leadership Coach 1, at many of the colleges they had worked at before ATD, the colleges would struggle with choosing the key priorities that would substantially increase student success and change student outcomes. The inability to prioritize leads to a lack of focus on often 10 or 12 priorities, making it difficult for constituents to know where to focus their time and energy. By working side by side with various constituents, CEO 1 was able to find consensus on the key priorities that would lead to broad student success and use them to leverage a sense of urgency created by the disequilibrium created by the college seeing and understanding the institutions disaggregated retention and completion data.
That focus on college wide initiatives being linked to student success, became a mantra for CEO 1. The completion agenda for example, CEO 1 was one of the first colleges to sign on for the completion agenda and was very successful in communicating a very specific target for the college in terms of improving or increasing their graduation rates by 2020. I suspect that there is probably not a single employee at College 1 that doesn't know what that number is in terms of what the college's goal is to increase the number of gradation by 2020. So very laser focused approach to student success, communicating that vision there was not a convocation that took place in the leadership that didn't focus on some aspect of student success.

According to Leadership Coach 1, CEO 1 was able to effectively leverage the structure provided by ATD in efforts to engage constituents and focus the college efforts.

My perception of what CEO 1 view was, ATD provided a very focused approach to examining where the institution was when CEO 1 got started under [the] student success agenda and also provided a mechanism…to move the institution forward with the student success work. CEO 1 saw ATD as a vehicle or an umbrella to talk about student success in a very cohesive way.

CEO 1 accomplished this by focusing on ATD’s five key performance indicators, with particular attention to student progression through developmental education and gateway courses as a means to increase degree and certificate completion.

Those five or so principles became the mantra for the college to rally around for student success. It took the mystery out of what the college was doing. So Achieving the Dream became that voice to rally stakeholders around student success. CEO 1 probably could have called it anything but as long as the focus was on those five principles or so, around student success, everybody knew what the college was attempting to do.

A seminal component of CEO 1’s message was in communicating a very specific target for the college in terms of increasing graduation rates by 2020. According to Leadership Coach 1, this message deeply penetrated the college community. The CEO did not miss an opportunity to repeat the college’s 2020 goals for graduation rates at every possible college gathering.

Leadership Coach 1 made it clear that the CEO’s ability to communicate clearly and across scales, in small groups, larger meetings, and to the entire college as well to groups outside
of the college was a key to the college’s overall ability to focus and improve student success.

CEO 1 is a very good communicator just at a personal level, but there were informed meetings with cabinet members, very high visibility meetings, conversations in the community, and let's say inside the college, frequent meetings with various stakeholder groups inside the college and outside of the college. Internally, I think CEO1 did a very good job in getting information in the hands of major stakeholders, including students and getting feedback from students. Then outside of the institution there were strategic organizations that CEO 1 felt [the college] needed support from and we were able to get that. The communication with the K through 12 institutions is a model that I think other people can benefit from.

Additionally, CEO 1 communicated the importance of gathering the best practices from around the country and communicating them to those working to increase student success. A robust structure was also created to systematically communicate progress toward meeting key indicator goals.

Core Team Leader 1

Core Team Leader 1 corroborated many of the points made by Leadership Coach 1, making it clear that CEO 1 used low retention and completion numbers shared widely with CEO 1 college as a means to move this situation to a state of disequilibrium. This in turn helped the college focus on a key set of priorities that would enable College 1 to increase student success. Additionally, Core Team Leader 1 emphasized that CEO 1 became more and more focused on intentional regrading, increasing student success with each passing year.

CEO 1 would tend to become more and more focused and intentional as CEO 1 moved from year to year. Maybe CEO 1 would start off by casting a wide net and then maybe the initiatives would reduce one and maybe reduce a little bit...As College 1 continues to focus on its students’ success, we focused even more on a few priorities and the campus is very aware that our focus for the next few years is on these priorities.
Core Team Leader 1 spoke clearly about the CEO’s intentionality and transparency regarding communication about increasing student success, being clear that those doing the work need to have the best possible information available to them, holding open meetings at which the entire campus is invited and where CEO 1 often takes the opportunity to provide updates on strategic initiatives. As a further effort toward transparency, a dashboard was created as a way to widely communicate the college’s progress. CEO 1 is also intentional about keeping the board of trustees informed.

Core Team Leader 1 also emphasized that a set of clear, understandable goals was part of the CEO’s communication strategy:

I think the first thing that CEO 1 has done is to set out a very clear message, and again, it seems trite and it might seem like branding or marketing, but setting that 2020 goal very early in CEO 1’s tenure at the college was something that we all knew about, something we all knew was gonna be a goal. I think we have every intention of reaching that goal. I think if we exceed it, we'll all be happy. I think if we miss it, I think we'll be very satisfied with a lot of the efforts we've made. But CEO 1 has been very clear to establish a target for the campus to rally around. From the very beginning, CEO 1 rallied the college around that number and it really is a completion number.

With collaborative feedback from the college community, communication became about this goal. It became, however, more nuanced and expanded over time to include retention and transfer rates.

Part of an open and transparent communicating strategy was to imbue the community with the understanding that responsibility for student success is shared across the college and is not held by any one group, but that all groups within the college are important to achieving higher rates of student success.
It doesn't belong just to our academic support services. It doesn't belong to our math and English Departments and those gateway courses. It doesn't belong to our admissions. It doesn't belong to our assessment office. Student success is a shared responsibility. I think CEO 1 established that very early on, and I think one way that has manifested itself is in a very collaborative work environment. CEO 1 has tried to get more stakeholders from across campus involved in our strategic initiatives and our shared governance.

One final point made by Core Team Leader 1 regarding CEO 1’s communication to the college regarding the need to increase student success is the boldness and fearlessness in pursuing these goals that was modeled for the college community to emulate.

And while CEO 1 hasn't enjoyed 100% agreement participation, I think there's a large majority of the college employees and stakeholders who are brought in, and even for those who might not be brought in and may be reluctant to participate, it is clear to them what this president's priorities are, and what CEO 1’s initiatives are, where CEO 1 focus is. CEO 1’s very clear about that. At the same time, CEO 1’s very human and approachable. But CEO 1 's just been very tenacious, fearless, and...I know these sound like aggressive words, but they're not. CEO 1 's been very focused on that and I think others at the institution will share that it's kind of a pleasure and a great learning experience to be working for CEO 1 for this reason.

CEO 1 corroborated the points made by Leadership Coach 1 and by Core Team Leader 1. CEO 1’s ability to communicate clearly and across scales, in small groups, larger meetings, and to the entire college as well as outside the college was emphasized in my interview with CEO 1.

I feel like I convened a lot of meetings. I have developed a narrative for why we think the work is important, just in terms of the college's success, but we really try to go to a deeper meaning and try to think about community and region and state, and ultimately, the success of our country. So developing a narrative that is urgent and compelling but achievable is probably my primary role.

CEO 1 made it clear that the purpose of convening so many meetings (at least monthly) was to track progress towards goals and that it is important for these meetings to be public and
open to the entire college community should they wish to attend. CEO 1 stressed the importance of tying these meetings to the institution’s goals around increasing completion and clearly signaling to those present how what the work of the meeting is about and the work they are engaged in as a college contributes to those goals.

Those meetings in themselves are a way of ensuring accountability. I think most of us like to go to those meetings with something positive to say, so it's a good way of continuing the...in a very public way, continue the focus on the outcomes we're seeking.

Part of how the goals to increase completion and later retention and transfer were communicated was through the deliberate use of two distinct strategic plans.

One is operational, and those are the goals: collect the bills, send out the bills, monitor the use of energy, everything that has to do with running the institution falls into an operational plan. The second strategic plan focuses on the college’s student success agenda. The second, success-focused strategic plan, sets targets based on external metrics like retention and completion but also looks to inspirational colleges across College 1’s state and the nation.

CEO 1 pointed out that the college is in its second five-year strategic plan focused on the college’s student success agenda. Both the first plan and the second plan delivered good results. The first plan led to College 1 receiving the LMAA from ATD. CEO 1 believes that the second plan will lead College 1 to being “if not a finalist, close to being a finalist for the Aspen Prize.” CEO 1 emphasized the importance of these plans being developed collaboratively, with significant input from across the institution and from constituencies outside the college as well. CEO 1 emphasized the large number of people who have been engaged to “work like crazy to accomplish” the goals laid out in the two strategic plans.

We look at inspirational institutions. We typically have looked at Aspen Prize finalists and winners, and then we look at national averages. We sat in consultation with our campus community and the board….I think it's a rigorous process that involves our college government system with respect to inputs.
An important component of communication to increase student success at College 1 was to respond to well-developed feedback loops as the system began to implement needed change. When efforts that had consumed precious resources were proving not to scale well, they were discussed amongst the constituent groups and abandoned. Through this process of listening, trial, and error, the college was able to scale down to

…three areas pretty quickly. One is, we had to start really focusing on what happened in the classroom. Two, we had to move from a very legacy, historically traditional style of student advising to a much more robust coaching manner of advising. And three, we had to invest in an electronic superstructure that would allow us in real time to monitor and intervene with student progress and also to develop a much more robust set of analytics that would help us long term with some of our advising goals. So those three areas became a fairly focused target for us in the leadership team.

A final point that CEO 1 made that ties to Theme One was the importance of clearly signallying to the community that the work is not a simple set of initiatives that constituents can focus on for a few years, make improvements, and then move back to “normal,” but that the work is long term, incremental, and continuous. It requires significant reworking of the system’s components. CEO 1 also emphasized that it is important for the CEO to signal that he or she is committed for the long haul.

I think that most change comes from the successful overhaul of infrastructure, both human infrastructure and then a technical infrastructure. And so a lot of the really hard work, task work, long hours that occurred in the first three to four years of this administration had everything to do with setting the table, had nothing to do with achieving results at the time. Now, people were working like crazy; they were telling me how hard we were working and how much good we were doing, and I kept saying, "You know, folks, the problem is, we haven't done anything yet. We're just getting ready to do." And if I had been a president that wanted to do five years here so I could set up my next ten years at a great place like whatever, that work would have never gotten done. And I think the mistake a lot of presidents make is that they get itchy feet.
Leadership Coach 2

The themes that emerged from College 2 matched closely those that had emerged from college 1 and served to reinforce Theme One: communicating the importance of improving student outcomes to the college community. An important addition to the subthemes that emerged in the interviews with those associated with College 2 was the importance of being hands-on while not being a micro-manager when signaling the importance of increasing student success. College 2 is large, and this meant that it was rare for CEO 2 to attend core and data team ATD meetings. However, Leadership Coach 2 made it clear that CEO 2 clearly signaled a strategic way by attending selected meetings when important decisions needed to be made by the groups. Leadership Coach 2 was also clear the CEO 2 had used the initial process of joining ATD and the inherent sharing of data as an opportunity to put the data front and center to create the kind of urgency needed to move the institution to change. Leadership coach 2 stated that CEO 2 did this at every opportunity, effectively moving the institution form its state of equilibrium.

She does so externally in meetings with her peers around the state and around the region. She is very much a proponent of the need for change in order to improve the success of students. She communicates all of that in the meetings that she has with the college wide and also works very diligently with her leadership group, with her cabinet if you will, in order to keep those issues on the front burner, and always in the minds of her staff.

Leadership Coach 2 described CEO 2 as “a very energetic, active, and committed individual.” And while CEO 2 is extremely engaged with numerous external stakeholders, CEO 2 is clear to signal at every opportunity the importance of increasing student success to the entire institution. Leadership Coach 2 described CEO 2 as “persistently on message regarding student success.”
It's a constant with CEO 2--talks about it at every possible turn. It is definitely no question around the institution and outside the institution where CEO 2 is in terms of student success. CEO 2 does so externally in meetings with CEO 2’s peers around the state and around the region.

According to Leadership Coach 2, CEO 2 is very much a proponent of institutional change in order to improve the success of students. CEO 2 communicates consistently in meetings college wide and also works very diligently with the cabinet in order to keep issues of improving student success on the “front burner” and always in the minds of CEO 2’s staff.

Core Team Leader 2

Core Team Leader 2 described the CEO as someone persistently on message regarding student success. For the last six years, student success has been one of the college’s three or four key mission tasks. CEO Team Leader 2 pointed out that CEO 2 has been supportive verbally, and that verbal support is important. Verbal support helps to set the agenda for the college, and it helps to signal to everyone at the college what is important and what is going to be judged important. Another key form of communication that ties into CEO 2’s verbal support for efforts to increase student success is making sure that the college adds the resources necessary to carry out the things they want to do. “CEO 2 puts the resources of the college behind what we need to do as well, and I think that has an implicit message of communicating that this is a desired change.” While adding resources also falls under Theme Five--significant financial commitment to ATD efforts--Core Team Leader 2 pointed out that adding resources is also a key signal to the college community of the level of importance associated with increasing student success at the college.
Core Team Leader 2 pointed out the importance of the CEO’s strong credibility, which stems from demonstrating, over the long term, concern for the college and its students. “They know that CEO 2 loves the college and is concerned about the college, and I think that benefits all of us, because CEO 2 brings a great deal of credibility and respect through stature and through CEO 2’s rhetoric.” Core Team Leader 2 also pointed out the consistency of CEO 2’s message and the ability to communicate clearly to a large district.

I think CEO 2 has, in terms of explicit communication, at all of our major college gatherings across the year...and we have sort of three all-college convocations...because we're a multi-campus institution...we don't all physically get together very often during the year, but three times a year we do--the start of the fall, the start of the spring semester, and near the end of the spring semester--and CEO 2 always talks about student success at those events. Always is willing to basically promote the agenda of what we're doing at that particular time.

Core Team Leader 2 pointed out that CEO 2 also made sure that efforts to increase student success were tied explicitly to the institution’s mission statement. Core Team Leader 2 indicated the consistency with which CEO 2 communicated that to the board of trustees.

At every one of our board of trustee meetings, we have a student success update included in the academic and student affairs report. There's eight board of trustee meetings, there's eight board of trustee meetings a year, so the trustees, eight times a year, get an update on what's going on in student success as well.

**CEO 2**

CEO 2 described some of the challenges they face communicating to such a large institution. College 2 has 5000 employees. About 1500 are full time. CEO 2 described the challenges of trying “to actually galvanize around an initiative or an impulse or a message.”
When CEO 2 was first hired at College 2, it was as a district chancellor with 15 direct reports including 3 presidents, 5 vice chancellors, and staff at a district office. Within a month of arriving, CEO 2 concluded that…to effectively communicate and unite the college around a common set of goals, including to effectively lead the college to improve student success, the structure would need to change. With the board’s approval, CEO 2’s title became president, 15 district administrators were laid off, and 5 district vice presidents were hired.

…it was clear to me we could never be one college if we had three separate presidents. These were all good, competent people, but you hire a president, a president acts like a president. You hire a chancellor, a chancellor is almost invisible. In terms of significant and sizeable leadership change that I think had paved the way then for the kind of college we are today. We used to be three very fine individual colleges. Now I think we can finally say we are one very fine community college. We're large. Last year we served 63,000 students. We're one large influential, very dynamic institution. I think that single change in executive structure, paved the way for the rather remarkable flowering and growth and empowerment of people who work at every level of this college.

CEO 2 made it clear that this structural change was key to shortening feedback loops within the system to successfully internally integrate the system and focus the institution’s efforts on a common set of goals that could be clearly communicated.

Beyond the structural changes, CEO 2 created a very intentional communication structure to compensate for the large size of the institution.

It's not just with three major speeches a year. It's not just with pulling a leadership team of 80 or 100 people together so everybody hears the message from the president. It's not for vice presidents’ filtering. It's not ten deans adding another layer of filter. I'm very capable. In fact, I was an English professor for 22 years. The two things--I can speak and I can write. I use both of those skills to try to influence, inspire, encourage our people every time I have an opportunity to speak to them. I will also tell you I and the vice presidents actually go every month to the campus forums. There's one on each campus. We go there, we're visible, we listen. We participate. We make sure people understand why we're doing what we're doing or why we're asking what we're asking.
CEO 2 holds an executive staff meeting every week and meets with each vice president every week. CEO2 seems to take a strongly team-oriented approach to running the college.

It's never my intent that either they get the praise or the blame solely for what they're doing or what they're thinking. We work very strongly as a team, the five of us. When we set a goal, and I'll use pathways as an example, we know that's the vice president of academic affairs instruction. That's going to be his area. But really every step along the way in terms of funding, in terms of structuring, in terms of developing, these are conversations that the vice president and I have.

This intentionality was further highlighted by CEO 2’s drawing attention to…speaking to the entire college three times per year.

I use those events to really frame and present a college message. It's not just me saying, oh shucks. We didn't have enough money or we don't have enough enrollment. Really what I try to do is lay the groundwork, thrown directly from our strategic plan, focusing on enrollment stabilization, economic stabilization. A president, I think, sets the tone, sets the expectations, and establishes the parameters for the way in which we're going to get to where we have to go. That's really what I try to do.

CEO 2 further pointed to the importance of the leader of the institution clearly defining the goals and direction that the institution needs to move in while acknowledging the role that each individual plays in successfully integrating the institutions efforts.

I'm a very engaged president. Institutions need guidance and a place this big cannot simply run on its own. That old notion of, let decisions be made at the lowest level--there's always some wisdom to that but if you really think about it, unless the valet at the hotel understands what the hotel's mission is and what their guiding precepts are, that poor guy is going to make bad decisions that somebody over him is going to get mad and fire him. We work very hard at making sure everybody here understands who we are, what we do, and who we serve. I often say to my folks…”the only reason any of us has a job is because we have students to serve.” That's fundamentally, I think, what a president of a community college needs to be doing: sticking a stake in the ground and saying, “this is us. This is our initiative. This is who we serve. This is why we're here.” It's not surprising to me that we've had so much talent and so much initiative shown at this institution, where if you don't really care about the students we serve, you don't stay very long. The work is too hard.
Leadership Coach 3

According to Leadership Coach 3, CEO 3 brought significant change to College 3. While College 3 had been involved with ATD from its inception, the CEO at the time had a very hands-off approach. College 3 had seen success with its efforts in the early years of ATD, but this was due to the efforts of the dean in charge of developmental education taking the initiative. Additionally, the small college had a group of faculty that began to explore and innovate in the area of collaborative learning without any clear leadership from the CEO. Upon arriving, CEO 3 was able to leverage the early ATD efforts into the first significant strategic planning that had been done at the college. CEO 3 did not try to stop or undo the existing efforts but instead attempted to coordinate and promote them more broadly within the college and local community as well as at the national level. According to Leadership Coach 3,

CEO 3 was extremely committed to the spirit of student success being the focus of every activity at the college from the time CEO 3 arrived, very strongly supportive of achieving that goal. The center of the strategic planning exercises was philosophically to reinforce this mission of helping students achieve. CEO 3 very actively involved the greater community in that strategic planning work, and began to formally bring that into being a part of the student achievement work.

Leadership Coach 3 described CEO 3 as highly supportive of change initiatives and as being energetically engaged with every element of campus activity, not in the sense that CEO 3 didn't allow people to do their jobs, but in being aware of what was going on across the campus. As a key part of the communication strategy, CEO 3 insisted on data-driven decisions, (a point that is explored in more depth in Theme Two), made sure that data was available to everybody, and brought constituents together regularly to talk about the data and how to act on it. “I think CEO 3 would have been described as certainly very much involved with campus leadership life. In fact, when CEO 3 first began I was a little shocked and there was some pushback, but within a
couple years CEO 3 overcame that pretty well.”

In addition to engaging more directly with the college community about increasing student success, CEO 3 also significantly reorganized the institution to more effectively communicate and execute the efforts of the college under ATD.

Core Team Leader 3

Core Team Leader 3 described the initial launch of ATD and the shock the college felt at seeing their institutional data disaggregated for the first time.

Change is very, very difficult. Anytime a organization the size of a college embarks upon change, even if change is for the betterment, everyone's not going to love it because that kind of change, when you're talking about data-driven decision making- that kind of change is difficult

This discomfort was experienced for a second time as the college gained a new CEO. Core Team Leader 3 was active in ATD efforts before the arrival of CEO 3 and also noticed significant changes in leadership practices under CEO 3, noting that

CEO 3 is very much an in-the-weeds type president, and CEO 3 immediately took the reins, if you will, of Achieving the Dream, and was requested to do so by Achieving the Dream. The last five years, CEO 3 's in the fifth now, our president has been deeply, deeply vested in this Achieving the Dream work and is frankly often called upon by Achieving the Dream to do presentations and workshops across the country on the importance of senior leadership buying into the Achieving the Dream change framework.

A kind of boots-on-the-ground perspective, it was a new dynamic and it took some getting used to, to have a president who was deeply vested. Not just in this work, frankly, but in the weeds with the day-to-day work of the college. CEO 3 is very much involved on the day-to-day operations of many things with regards to the institution, ATD being primary among them. Some of the folks that had been leading that work across the campus found it a bit challenging that the leadership and even, kind of power, if you will, had been sucked up to the top, but it was a necessary move, quite frankly.

With the arrival of CEO 3, Achieving the Dream at College 3 evolved quickly from being
viewed within the college as a developmental education initiative to an institution-wide initiative. The language and the nomenclature and the conversations around Achieving the Dream changed as well. No longer was Achieving the Dream viewed as just in this department and in that division; it was now viewed as a campus-wide work. An increased focus on sharing data became an integral part of the CEO’s role. “Data became not just the developmental education division’s, but we were looking at retention across campus and completion rates across campus and graduation rates across campus.”

Core Team Leader 3 made it clear that although the college had been involved with ATD from the beginning, if the college were to make significant gains, the CEO would need to be highly engaged and sending a clear message to the college community.

If you don't have the CEO on board, you're not going to have significant gains. We saw that. We are living testimony of that. In order to really maximize what Achieving the Dream is about, you've got to have the CEO onboard from the get-go. The CEO frankly has to be driving the train.

Core Team Leader 3 stated the most important thing was that CEO 3 was embracing the initiative and making it clear to the college community that CEO 3 was learning about and becoming knowledgeable about ATD and would be an active participant in ATD.

Just a couple of months after CEO 3 came onboard as president, I had written what was called a Catalyst grant and it was part of one of our ATD initiatives funded through ATD, and contingent upon us getting that grant was CEO 3’s involvement. CEO 3 made a pledge to ATD that CEO 3 would be actively involved. CEO 3 came to every meeting; CEO 3 came to every workshop. A couple of times...was the only president there....CEO 3 was making a very bold statement that said there's a new sheriff in town, and that that new sheriff was going to be driving this--or at least co-driving this--ATD train for College 3.

Core Team Leader 3 points to this moment as a clear signal to the college community that now ATD was a senior leadership priority. It was no longer a developmental education initiative,
it was no longer a single dean's initiative, and it was therefore an institutional priority. It was then integrated into the overall strategic plan. According to Core Team Leader 3, from the point CEO 3 came on board and began communicating, a redefined vision of the college as a student centered institution emerged.

It was crystal clear that CEO 3 was going to be communicating that very clear mission, which says we are now a student-centered institution. That doesn't always sit well, because when you become squarely student-centered it's the student that takes priority, not the staff, not the, faculty, not the board, not the foundation. It's the student that takes priority. CEO 3 has clearly, over and over again, communicated that to multiple stakeholders across our community and across our campus. Frankly, the president is the only one that can. I will say again that we will never see maximum change and maximum moving of the needle until it is the president that communicates that vision and commitment to student success with a very clear message that we're transitioning to this new way of thinking.

Core Team Leader 3 emphasized the importance of the CEO having easy and constant access to institutional data in order to be able to talk about such information and communicate it clearly along with the challenges that the institution must collectively address. “That's all frankly under the president's wheelhouse and if there's going to be significant change…I've seen that frankly in spades from our president.”

Core Team Leader 3 emphasized that, in order for significant student success efforts to work, the CEO has to be the champion. If the CEO is not the champion, there may be pockets of success, but it is not going to maximize the impact.

I say that because we lived both sides of that. We've lived through a time period where the CEO was not the champion, and we saw very small, localized good results, but in a very small area. Then we saw the other end of it, which was where the CEO became the champion and we witnessed firsthand the impact that it can have.
CEO 3

Upon arriving at College 3, CEO 3 prioritized as follows: convincing the college that change was necessary, developing the first formal strategic planning work, and committing to making sure the theme of increasing student success became the focus of every activity at the college. The center of the strategic planning exercises was philosophically to reinforce this mission of helping students achieve. The activity of strategic planning had largely been informal throughout the college’s history, and the first thing CEO 3 did was formalize the activity of strategic planning. CEO 3 also formalized many of the institution's activities by outlining what kind of objectives were desirable, establishing timelines for those objectives, and assigning responsibility for them. None of those things had been a part of anything formal at the college prior to CEO 3’s arrival. CEO 3 also made engaging the larger community in communication regarding increasing student success a high priority.

CEO 3 stated, “We now have an annual data summit. Everyone is invited and it is very inclusive. The driving questions that we focus on are what is in the best interest of the community and the college.” The use of data will be discussed in more detail under Theme Two below.

CEO 3 has three major college-wide addresses per year. “It is very important to be on message about student success. I try to be present, I try to be everywhere, I try to be everywhere in the community asking what do you need in employees.”
Theme Two: Commitment on the Part of the CEO to Increase the Use of Data to Inform Decision Making

The second theme to emerge as a practice of CEOs at the three LMAA-winning colleges examined in this study was commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision making. This is an important component of ATD’s prescribed methodology for institutional change and again was evident as a practice of all three CEOs as demonstrated by excerpts from all nine interviews. ATD encourages each institution to look at institutional data to understand the problems and challenges it faces related to improving student outcomes as a whole while closing achievement gaps. As they begin to work with ATD, colleges see their institutional retention and completion rates longitudinally and disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, income, and many other criteria. The premise of ATD is that, if communicated effectively throughout the institution, data can be turned into meaningful information that can be utilized to make better decisions. Essentially, the system becomes prepared for change, moved from a sense that all is fine, or equilibrium, to a sense that the system must change, or disequilibrium, by looking honestly at its data. The three LMAA-winning colleges in this study have developed a deep capacity to collect, analyze, communicate, and act on data. It is evident from all nine interviews as well as analysis of available documents that using increasing data capacity and communicating progress toward goals is a seminal practice of CEOs at LMAA-winning colleges.
Leadership Coach 1

Leadership Coach 1 described a college that has taken time through the strategic planning process to identify key priorities, defining those priorities based on a very careful analysis of the data. This has been a highly successful, highly collaborative effort that is still in place and has become a model for other community colleges to replicate. The coach described a college focused on being informed by data derived from the institution’s own research and from feeder institutions. From this they have developed a very precise execution plan to accomplish the work.

Leadership Coach 1 stated that

Prior to the Achieving the Dream student success focus that the college engaged in, they were more or less in the mode like many other community colleges, focusing on compliance kind of, collecting data, doing state reports, responding to requests, etc. It wasn't data collection with the purpose to inform us about our student success progress; they used data about the institution to inform decision making college-wide and encouraged administrators at all levels of the institution and faculty to take a look at the data to improve the effectiveness of the work that was taking place at the institution.

CEO 1 made improving the college’s work in terms of institutional research and institutional effectiveness a priority by increasing the number of staff in those departments that would interface with not only institutional effectiveness, but institutional research and technology. All three areas were evaluated and improved in terms of what was expected of them, but CEO 1 also made it a priority to make sure more institutional resources were allocated to them.

If you were to go back and take a look at those budgets over five years ago and look at where it is now, you would see a remarkable increase in the staffing and also in terms of the line item allocation in those areas. The data coach and I both felt that was very impressive on the part of the institution. It's not easy to say that we don't have the
capacity and they did. They said our present capacity isn't sufficient enough to take us where we want to go, and they very deliberately went about identifying resources, reallocating resources, replacing talent when it was available to do so in those three areas that intersected with each other so strategically.

Additionally, CEO 1 made it a priority to help increase access, analysis, and reporting of data. Leadership Coach 1 also stated that the “core team leader was fanatical about data. I think that the two of them, the core team leader and CEO 1, made a really great team in terms of keeping the energy growing to promote use of access data, the use of progression data.” The priority was to not just make the data available but to make sure it was in the hands of those most likely to be able to leverage that data into significant institutional change. Very quickly, the college started to, in a systematic way, collect, analyze, and report data in a manner that the institution and the consumers could use. The speed at which this took place was very impressive to both the leadership and data coaches.

One of the things that Leadership Coach 1 admired about CEO 1 and the team was their ability to reflect on all of the data, and not just the positive or flattering data.

I think that really is what set them apart in terms of being able to be very strategic about their work. They didn't censor their data, they said okay that does not look good, it's not where we want to be but we're not gonna hide it. I'm not sure that people appreciated that to the extent possible about the leadership. CEO 1 wasn't about trying to make people feel good about the data in that regard and I'm sure CEO 1 took some grief about it early on, but now I sense that people appreciate it more.

Core Team Leader 1

Core Team Leader 1 felt that CEO 1 significantly moved College 1 toward a much more data-informed decision making process; this was a significant departure from the way the college had operated previously.
I was only here for a few months before CEO 1 got here, but just based on anecdotal evidence from people who've been here longer and what I have, is we are really using data much more than prior to CEO 1’s arrival, and we're using it to inform a lot of our decision making. We're doing really good work on collecting data, using systems to collect and track data for us. It's not perfect. It's never gonna be perfect. But I think a lot of what we do now is driven by a lot of the data on retention, what students need, where the stopping out points are, and I really do think that's been a significant contribution of this particular president.

Core Team Leader 1 has seen an acceleration in the use of data over the last few years as the college has learned to leverage different systems to complement and support the human efforts for student success. Core Team Leader 1 noted that CEO 1's been very interested in investing in technology systems to collect data and help with student supports investigation. The college is particularly interested in scheduling tools and predictive analytics to begin moving data out of the hands of administrators and faculty and into the hands of students to provide students with better information about how to schedule their courses. The predictive analytics tools, they hope, will provide information about students and where students might be at risk and also to identify what types of student behaviors that will help students to be successful, with the intent of providing counselors and advisors with information to help students be more successful. “I think those things combined are our biggest investment moving forward, from a technology perspective, to help kind of complement and support what our counselors and faculty and students are already doing.”

When asked at the end of the interview if there was anything I had missed in my questions, Core Team Leader 1 took the opportunity to summarize what he saw as the key leadership practices of CEO 1 to move the college to LMAA-winning status. Moving the college to a culture more informed by data was a clear component. “If I were to take one or two
sentences to summarize what I think CEO 1 has done to position us to be a Leah Meyer Austin winner, it really is that shared culture and responsibility for student success informed by data.”

CEO 1

It was clear in my interview with CEO 1 that the use of data in efforts to improve student outcomes was viewed as seminal. The college uses two sets of metrics to monitor the progress of the institution; five of them involve institutional effectiveness and five are student success outcomes. The college tracks progress against goals, some of which are aspirational, some of them enabling alignment with peer groups. As the college sets a goal for any work activity, it sets both milestones and longer term goals so that the college knows where they want to be in the future and they can clearly see milestones along the way to get there.

After arriving at the college and beginning to work with ATD, CEO 1 made increasing the size of the institutional research office a priority.

I think we've probably got one of the, for our size, one of the largest institutional research and analysis groups out there, that we now have the equivalent of 12 full-time people that work in that area. We have, as I said, invested in a data warehouse so that we can now manipulate and synergize data from very disparate systems across the campus that here before took hours and hours of time to unravel and then put back together. That investment has been huge for us. I think the investments that we made recently with a student tracking system is that we've got products that we've just recently brought on line. All of that have been resources that we've tried to provide both to the analysts and the advisors and the students themselves, to track their progress towards their goals.

The college tracks institutions that have been identified by the community college boards as College 1’s peers, but also tracks what CEO 1 referred to as “inspirational institutions,” such as Aspen Prize finalists and winners. This data is then used to set, at first, five-year goals and now four-year goals. These goals are set in consultation with the campus community and the
board of trustees. “I think it's a rigorous process that involves our college government system with respect to inputs. Ultimately, the board of trustees makes the decision on what outcomes we're seeking.”

CEO 1 stated that when College 1 started with ATD, the coaches were very helpful in introducing new data sets from other institutions. About setting the colleges initial goals with ATD, CEO 1 stated,

I think that the data coach ...was very helpful to our institution, our staff, in helping source the data from our own files, and how we could use it and manipulate it. I think that the idea that they came in and the discipline of data-informed decisions and socializing those terms early on for the college was helpful to us. CEO 1 was clear to emphasize the importance of ATD in helping to socialize the college to the use of data, as the college moved from a more anecdotal culture to a more data-informed one.

Leadership Coach 2

Leadership Coach 2 felt that in terms of the institution's capacity with data, it starts with giving the proper support and proper staffing to the institutional research and institutional technology areas. Leadership Coach 2 felt that CEO 2 has been able to attract some very capable people to work in their institutional research office. “It's always a good thing when you have people on staff who are really quite good at not only collecting but analyzing data, and that is really important to the basis of Achieving the Dream, because we use data to inform decisions.” Leadership Coach 2 stated that CEO 2 has been able to support the IR and IT functions by shifting resources. CEO 2 has also modeled for the college community by the use of data to inform decisions that are made with the cabinet.

When they are looking at the issues that they've begun to tackle in terms of student success and checking on really using the data to either next term or check those things which they want to continue to fund. Where they put the money, where they put their
effort, how they go about making changes, [are decisions] very, very, very much data informed.

Leadership Coach 2 commented on how the CEO has prioritized the viability of data across the college so that now data is available to all staff and faculty and nothing is hidden. There is a wealth of data available.

You don't need a special key to get to it. It's easily available. They use data in most of their activities in the academic departments, in the student services arena. All of it is terribly important to the way they go about making their decisions to either change or continue particular practices that they have.

Core Team Leader 2

Core Team Leader 2 felt that CEO 2 had been key to transitioning the college to a data-driven culture. The CEO facilitated this transition by making sure the planning resources and evaluation office were well-funded and supported. Core Team Leader 2 also felt that by community college standards, they have a very large planning resource and evaluation office, with five full-time professionals working there, along with support staff, which represents a significant investment in time and energy to make sure that the staff is large enough to be able to carry out data collection work at the scale needed to support the college’s efforts to increase student success. Core Team Leader 2 stated that CEO 2 “talks about the college’s successes or failures in light of the data, and what that data indicates, and has been a kind of a person that is generally persuaded by data, and people know that--that CEO 2's generally persuaded by data.”

Reflecting on CEO 2’s response to data and the overall culture of the institution regarding the use of data, Core Team Leader 2 stated:

I don't think any place in the world is completely data-driven and completely devoid of emotions or personality quirks or things like that, but more than any other place that I've
worked, I think the data about what's happening drives our decisions. I can literally say that's true. That in my whole career, and I've worked at three main academic institutions, and at various levels within those institutions, I would say that this is the situation where decisions are the most data-driven that I've ever been in. Now some of that may be a general change...a general, across-the-board change that's occurred in American academics over the last 50 years, but I think this is a place where data is particularly important.

CEO 2

CEO 2 has made sure that College 2 has a very well-staffed research office and that significant resources had been used to do so. CEO 2, however, made it clear that it is important to not just blindly follow the data but to constantly be thinking about the students that the college serves and what is best for them, not just what will bring an immediate jump in retention or completion numbers.

We look for hard data, yes, to help us know that what we're doing is looking promising or being successful. We also are very aware, given our student body, that you have to look at data with your heart as well as your head. That gives us the confidence that we can try something and we can even try it again and again. But at some point, we're going to know that it's working for students or it's not.

CEO 2 demonstrated a great familiarity with the college’s data and talked at length about new key performance indicators that College 2 is utilizing, such as the number of students completing college-level courses within one year as an indicator of how well precollege acceleration is working. CEO 2 emphasized that College 2 is also always looking for new sources of data to monitor more effectively student engagement and progress. One example of this was a newly launched “one card” system that records students attendance across the classes and events at the college and provides a rich data set from which refinements to interventions can be made.
CEOs affirmed what had been stated by Core Team Leader 2 and Leadership Coach 2 about a deeply entrenched, data-driven decision-making culture and that CEO 2 has led this change.

We pay a lot of attention to data and we slice and dice this data every which way to someday as a way of knowing. We're not a rich college. We're not poor, but the last thing we want to do is throw good money after bad. For example, our research staff probably has eight people in it. We give them the most cutting edge equipment and technology and software that we can provide. We want all the data that we can gather.

I would say we've moved well away from the old models of community colleges were pretty good at. That is anecdotal proof. “I had a student who did, I had a student who said, I had three students who....” We still talk that way sometimes, but we don't make decisions that way. Anybody at this institution who wishes, has access to data. We're data driven. It's a very trite phrase but we are.

Leadership Coach 3

According to Leadership Coach 3, CEO 3 insisted on data-driven decisions, made sure that data was available to everybody, and brought them together to talk about it often enough and actively. Before CEO 3 arrived, under the previous CEO the college was very involved in collecting, analyzing, and using data. It had a capable yet small IR department that was able to develop really creative models for them that allowed them to take a look at the risk factors among incoming students and give a percentage profile of success without interventions. It also helped them realize which interventions were working most successfully with students. Before CEO 3 came, they were using that kind of data very successfully. CEO 3 has been able to capitalize on these early gains combined with a significant ability in the use of analytics from CEO 3’s time working in private industry to establish a strong IR infrastructure and data-driven culture at College 3. The last time I visited, they had a new IT person who, I thought, was very capable and they look like they're back on track. Leadership Coach 3 commented:
The core team leader had taken over oversight of that position, and they were doing a good job of [it]. Starfish (a CRM or customer relationship management software targeted to higher education) had come into their arsenal of technological weapons, and they were using it successfully.

Leadership Coach 3 stated that the processes there were regular cross-divisional meetings examining data, measuring the data against the goals they had established for themselves, determining where they were falling short, reshaping their strategies to try to adjust for those shortcomings, and establishing new goals to keep the college moving forward.

**Core Team Leader 3**

Institutional effectiveness falls under Core Team Leader’s official responsibilities, Core Team Leader 3 made the case that three years prior to this interview, the college’s small IE office of one was no longer satisfactory--that is, was no longer large enough to fill the demands of what College 3 was becoming. Even in the face of declining enrollment coupled with declining state support, Core Team leader 3 did not believe an IE office of one would continue to be adequate. The senior leadership and the president agreed with Core Team Leader 3 and tripled the size of their IE office to an FTE of three. Core Team Leader 3 indicated that this change, supported by CEO 3, has had a profound impact on the institution’s ability to provide data for decision making.

With that comes greater responsibility and great demands for output. With this increased funding for that department, they've got a lot more on their shoulders now and our president and other senior leadership team members are requesting and requiring more and more on a daily basis from them for data, to really inform our decision making process.
CEO 3

CEO 3 stated that the tripling of the IE staffing had a profound effect on the institution’s ability to be more data-informed in decision making. CEO 3 described how data is now shared across the institution. “We hold an annual data summit. Everyone is invited, very inclusive, and with the driving question of what is in the best interest of the community and the college. I emphasize data-driven decisions, bring people together to talk about it often.” CEO 3 described in detail the purposeful restructuring of the IT and IR departments.

Before I arrived, the college was very involved in using data. I rearranged the IT and IR departments. Core Team Leader 3 had taken over oversight of that position, and they were doing a good job of it, but we completely restructured Institutional research. There was no real analytic capacity when I came.

CEO 3 also felt strongly that thoroughly understanding data collection and analysis processes are key skill sets that many of today’s community college CEOs lack. CEO 3 felt that their background in business and community development, and the next generation of CEOs, is likely to have much better skills regarding the use of data in decision making.

I firmly believe that data collection and data analysis is a crucial skill set for the next generation of presidents. It’s usually very obvious in the data what is not working. Being able to act on these signals is very important. The new generation of presidents understands data and how it drives everything you do. Not a part of my generation’s thinking, but my background in business and community development helped prepare me to use data effectively.

**Theme Three: Empowerment by the CEO of College Personnel to Lead Institutional Change Efforts**

The third theme to emerge as a practice of CEOs at the three LMAA-winning colleges examined in this study was empowerment of college personnel to lead institutional change
efforts. While ultimate decision making authority remains with the CEO, through the process of empowerment the CEO cedes much of the incremental decisions inherit in planning, initiating, and evaluating the institutional change process. An important aspect of Kotter’s 1996 Leading for Change Model is this process of ceding much of the decision-making process. Kotter stresses that without empowering broad based action, efforts at systemic change will not succeed. Many change efforts fail due to insufficient attention to this step and the result is the stalling of the change effort at the beginning stages of its implementation. Empowering broad-based action is critical to the success of any change effort because the ties in an organization to maintaining the status quo are very strong.

According to Kanter (1983), organizations that provide multiple sources of loosely committed resources at decentralized or local levels, that structure open communications systems, and that create extensive network-forming devices are more likely to be empowering. Leadership and/or supervision practices that are identified as empowering, including (a) establishing role clarity through the process of giving voice to constituents, (b) fostering opportunities for subordinates to participate in decision making, (c) providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraint, (d) setting inspirational and/or meaningful goals, and (e) expressing confidence in subordinates accompanied by high performance expectations (Appelbaum, et al 2012; Duanxu, Chenjing & Chaoyan, 2016; Kezar & Eckel, 2008).

Empowerment of individuals from across each college’s hierarchy to engage in the work of improving student outcomes by the CEO is a clear salient practice, evidence for which exists in all three colleges. Below are excerpts supporting this key theme from seven of the nine interviews.
Leadership Coach 1

Leadership Coach 1 saw the leadership at the college become more inclusive as work with ATD unfolded. When CEO 1 first started the Achieving the Dream work, senior leadership was engaged in the work in terms of defining the strategies and identifying next steps. As the college started to launch its strategic plan, CEO 1 saw the need to “do a more of a distributed kind of leadership approach where they developed a variety of college wide teams that was headed up by various leaders on the campus, be it a dean and or a very talented faculty member.” Thus leadership was empowered at various levels of the institution as the work unfolded, as contrasted with having been more localized at the CEO’s cabinet level when they began working with ATD. Leadership Coach 1 noted that the more inclusive the engagement became, the more energized the campus became about the work.

I think that I would say that was a very visionary approach by the president to understand and realize there was talent at that college that CEO 1 could tap into. CEO 1 was able to and understood the need to have broader engagement and invited more people to become a part of the leadership of those initiatives, and CEO 1 got some results as a result of that.

Leadership Coach 1 also felt that a defining moment for the college was that they just didn't develop a strategic plan, but they had periodically what they call progression analysis, looking at whether or not they were accomplishing what they set out to do. In this process they didn't wait until the end of the year to assess what it was they were doing; there was a progression of accountability throughout the year in terms of making an assessment. The college put more strategic information in the hands of the president and the team leaders so that they could make changes as needed as different projects were unfolding. College interventions that this applied to were alternative methods for placement in math and English, an early alert system to identify students that were at risk of not succeeding, and the college’s new student success
course. At the end of each year, they held what they call a college-wide analysis of the work that had taken place, which the ATD coaches were intimately involved in. According to Leadership Coach 1, this process was key to how the college was able to get a firm grasp on the student success work taking place at the college.

That was a highly successful collaborative effort that is still in place and has become a model for other community colleges to replicate. The whole idea is about focus and the focus being linked to the goals of the institution—the focus being informed by data, by the institution’s own data and that data that they were able to analyze from their feeder institutions, and then developing a very precise execution plan to get the work done. I think those are the several areas that was very distinctive about the work that was taking place at College 1.

Leadership Coach 1 pointed out that the process was not only inclusive, it was highly transparent.

Of a wide range of constituent voices, it was not secretive; various stakeholders, staff, faculty, students were able to identify ways based on the different opportunities of how they could be engaged. I'm thinking that the stakeholders, including trustees, would say that the opportunities were fair and inclusive.

CEO 1 created an environment through this inclusive leadership and distributed leadership in which people felt comfortable saying that they could see better ways to get the work done.

I think that there was an empowerment culture throughout the whole process. As evidence of that, the person that worked in charge of strategic planning was mentored and developed. She's now president [at another institution]. I saw other promotions that came up through faculty ranks. I saw several of the minority employees I know were supported to attend various leadership development groups. I'm saying that there was an empowerment culture—I do believe that there were avenues, platforms with the institution that various stakeholders could reach out to, have access to and feel that they were making a valuable contribution to the institution.

CEO 1 quite deliberately made an attempt to engage with and empower minority communities within the college as well. Leadership Coach 1 witnessed CEO 1 personally get
more engaged in deliberate conversations with faculty and staff of color. To initiate this process of empowerment, CEO 1 invited Leadership Coach 1, an African American female, to meet with the faculty and staff of color to hear what their concerns were without CEO 1 being in the room, because CEO 1 felt being present in the room might censor some of their questions.

According to Leadership Coach 1, CEO 1 was very sensitive to creating a non-threatening environment in which people would feel that they “could participate without prejudice.” Other examples of this inclusiveness and empowerment are that CEO 1 commissioned several research papers on the college culture. The researchers conducted surveys; they strategically invited key individuals to participate in the equity diversity committee.

I think they set up governing structures and planning structures to engage stakeholders in the student success work at the college. They've taken the mystery out of how to get engaged. They have excellent feedback loops to stakeholders to say this is what we said we were gonna do, this is what we did, and this is how it worked. That's real clear. They've done that extremely well in terms of stakeholder groups. I think they've also given voice to some of the underserved people inside the institution in terms of staff and faculty and staff of color. I see more people emerging and participating in campus activities than in previous years.

Core Team Leader 1

According to Core Team Leader 1, CEO 1 helped everyone at College 1 understand that student success is a shared responsibility, that it does not belong just to academic support services, Math and English Departments, admissions, or the assessment office. “I think CEO 1 established that very early on and I think one way…that has manifested itself is CEO 1’s created a very collaborative work environment. CEO 1 has tried to get more stakeholders from across campus involved in our strategic initiatives and our shared governance.” At College 1, all strategic plans have shared leadership with an administrator and a faculty member. “I think that
collaboration has really helped solidify and live out that message that student success is a shared responsibility, not just belonging to faculty, not just belonging to administration, or not just belonging to specific departments.”

Core Team Leader 1 stated that CEO 1 has been very intentional about putting an administrator and a faculty member as co-chairs on strategic teams. Core Team Leader 1 stated that helps flatten out the hierarchical structure.

In our departments, in our particular areas, that hierarchy still does exist and we do have reporting structures. But I think most of our student success initiatives really lie within our strategic plan. And that shared leadership, I think, really serves to kind of flatten that structure. And then we pull people in onto those teams from different areas across the college. I've chaired several of those committees. And I'm serving on that committee with another faculty member, and in that role; she doesn't report to me. I don't report to her. The people on the committee, whether they're from my area or not, aren't reporting to me in that capacity. This is a truly a collaborative process that we're engaged in. So it sounds a little trite to say titles are gone, positions are gone, the hierarchy is gone. But when we're working on those initiatives, we try to get the right people in the room, try to create environment where everybody feels comfortable contributing and the ideas are freely shared.

Core Team Leader 1 stated that while this model is not practiced 100% of the time across the college, it is the dominant structure for committees and had profoundly changed the college culture to be more collaborative.

Core Team Leader 1 felt that most campus stakeholders would see CEO 1 as collaborative.

At worst, maybe consultive where maybe that CEO 1 consults things and it maybe doesn't reach that level of collaboration. But I think that's more of an issue of perception. I do see it as collaborative and in conversations I have with a lot of other people on campus. For everyone, from faculty to staff members to fellow administrators, there is a strong sense that CEO 1 is collaborative.

I've chaired of several of those committees and I'm serving on that committee with
another faculty member, and in that role, CEO2 doesn't report to me. I don't report to CEO2. The people on the committee, whether they're from my area or not, aren't reporting to me in that capacity. This is a truly a collaborative process that we're engaged in.

Core Team Leader 1 also felt that one of the most significant things CEO 1 had done that plays into the spirit of collaboration is delegate some of the communication responsibility. CEO 1 expects his leaders on campus, whether that's deans, other administrators, or faculty leaders, to communicate to their stakeholders, to their constituents, the direction and progress toward the strategic priorities across the campus. Core Team Leader 1 stated that CEO 1 is very intentional and very purposeful about the shared responsibility for communication.

So it's not only from CEO 1, or our marketing folks, our institutional research folks sharing this information. CEO 1 wants everybody to hear it and he wants the leaders to take some responsibility for sharing some of this information as well. If I were to take one or two sentences to summarize what I think CEO 1 has done to kind of...to position us to be a Leah Meyer Austin winner, it really is that shared culture and responsibility for student success informed by data. That is not one person, one department's responsibility. It's everybody's responsibility.

CEO 1 corroborated the statements regarding collaboration and empowerment being important factors in College 1’s success. When prompted with an open-ended question as to how others would describe his leadership, CEO 1 responded with the following description.

Some would probably describe me as a benevolent dictator. That's probably the word I would use to describe my own leadership style. But I think words like persistent and focused. Pretty passionate about the outcomes we’re seeking, pretty relentless about them, but at the same time I think most folks would say my leadership style allows for a lot of folks to reach our goals in ways that align best with their leadership styles, not my way of doing business. So I'm really determined, as a leader, to reach consensus on the outcomes we seek, as important to me that my style of doing it is the same as your style of doing it.

CEO 1 went on to describe in some detail the manner in which individuals are given
responsibility for initiatives and communication and to emphasize that anyone within the
institution who is willing to work on student success issues is welcomed to the work.

Core Team Leader 2

Core Team Leader 2 was clear that empowering others to engage in the work of
increasing student success is a central leadership practice for CEO 2.

CEO 2

CEO 2 definitely feels that empowerment is one of their most important tasks, and
probably feels that that's one of the most important tasks of the enrollment institute and
services vice president. We both, every time that I have my weekly meeting with [CEO 2],
we talk about student success aspects, and CEO 2 knows that that's a major
 component of my job, and CEO 2 sees that as something that is good for the college, and
that CEO 2 wants me to do.

CEO 2

In CEO 2’s interview, empowerment was a recurring theme across the questions that I
asked. As College 2 is quite large, with 3 colleges serving over 60,000 students annually, CEO 2
relies heavily on others helping to carry the leadership load.

We actually then created what I would call a quite empowered leadership team at the next
level, with few assistant vice presidents. I will tell you that because my own style is very
one on one because it's very people connected, that we very quickly moved into a mode
of ... this is how I would say it, drawing circles that pull people in rather than circles that
push people out. Because we're so huge, a favorite phrase of mine is, we can have no
small conversations here. We serve too many students to be focusing on doing things that
would advantage say fifty or a hundred students. We have to move in innovative ways to
actually develop systemic advances in how work was done here and how it is done now
to meaningfully move that proverbial needle...I think that in itself is one of the biggest
achievements that we have been able to build a community out of.

When discussing the college’s efforts to increase student success in the years running up
to the winning of the LMAA, CEO 2 describes a process in which all who are willing to
participate are welcome to share their ideas in an iterative process of collective sensemaking
grounded in available empirical data.

We did all of that, and it took us a couple of years, because the strategy in each instance was to take a good idea, get a lot of people to weigh in on it, anybody who wanted to had something to say, they could say it. Then because we are so large, we couldn't just say, tomorrow everybody when they register is now in an accelerated developmental course, we do things here in pilot mode. We start small, we examine, we analyze. We look at the successes and we look at the--it's not actual failures, at least the things that didn't go right. We bring all these people together again. Back and forth, they end up making recommendations. We expand the pilot in the next year. We expand the pilot in the next year and the next year. It takes a while for a place like ours to fully scale up the kind of developmental acceleration model that we have for English, reading, and math. We did it. It's working. It's working because it isn't just me or the academic officers saying this is what you have to do. It's taking the fertile ideas of the people who do this work and really giving them an environment and an opportunity to participate in taking that good idea or maybe we know it's not a good idea but okay, give it a try. Before you know it, we have buy-in that truly I didn't imagine we could get when I came here as the chancellor.

CEO 2 went on to explain that at College 2 they have one strategic plan and the process of developing it is inclusive, iterative, and serious. “I see it as my role to get that effort in motion and then we get all these people engaged and talking about it. By the end of the year, we have consensus around a strategic plan to propose to the board of trustees.”

CEO 2 sees the role of CEO as very hands-on while not micromanaging, as someone who articulates a vision for the institution, and yet somebody who respects that they as leader do not have all of the answers. “I really look to all these talented people who work for me or with me to actually create what needs to be created in order to do what we need to be doing for the students that we serve.”

CEO 2 summed up the approach to empowerment and leadership and the vision for the roles faculty, administrators, and staff play across the institution with the following statement:

One of my own biases is that I think leadership needs to be practiced at every level. Whether it's the custodian or the union steward or the computer technician, they all need
to really understand why they're here. They might be ancillary to what happens in the classroom. That never means that the faculty are the most important people. It just means the faculty are in the classroom and all the rest of us are outside it. We all need to be supporting.

**Leadership Coach 3**

As stated earlier, College 3 began participating in ATD from its inception. The CEO present during the initial years had been CEO for three decades and was a very hands-off president. Two centers of innovation and leadership seem to have emerged at the college during this period; the first was led by the dean in charge of developmental education and focused on developmental education. The second developed from within the faculty and was facilitated by the support of the core team leader. It was focused on moving the college to a more cooperative learning model. One of CEO 3's strengths was that, upon arrival in 2012, recognizing the potential to work as a catalyst among the faculty, CEO 3 moved individuals strategically within the organization to create a much stronger ATD leadership position and actively supported the work of the core team leader.

The core team leader was not the academic VP, interestingly enough. In fact, they were in charge of the development of education and had been a faculty member. The core team leader was very well connected with the faculty and key disciplines, and had grants that allowed them then to do [ATD work]. In some ways they established their position informally as a core team leader just by enabling these faculty to go out to these conferences, bringing them back, and overseeing a series of informal collaborations in the faculty ranks that brought them together to implement that in a collaborative way. The core team leader started with developmental classes, found great success there, promoted those successes in other disciplines, and it just spread like a grass fire through the institution.

Leadership Coach 3 went on to reflect on the leadership that emerged at College 3 under its hands-off president in its first years with ATD:

I don't think I can emphasize enough the fact that leadership that really made the biggest difference at the institution emerged out of the faculty. I think one of the things Achieving the Dream discovered during its 12 years of existence is that changing things
on the periphery of teaching and learning and student support services and so on can provide some degree of incremental change, but not major significant change. Unless that happens, (significant changes in teaching and learning) it's not going to be a game changer, and for some reason, and I'm not sure that I know why, the faculty at College 3 [under the CEO that preceded the current and LMAA- winning president] were able to catalyze themselves to innovative ways to do things differently.

The principal leaders had been not at the presidential level but at the faculty and mid-tier administrative levels. CEO 3 came in and provided the missing support and organizational strength to the leadership that was already there.

Absent that, I don't think they would have achieved what they had, even with great leadership. They did it without leadership with the previous CEO. This was important. They got much greater formality under CEO 3, and CEO 3's been a terrific president for them, but it was already there and constantly moving internally in the organization. It's a very heavily unionized environment in the state, very strong centralization, and so the things that you would think would work against a faculty being innovative and creative and risk taking and so on, you wouldn't think would be there, but for some reason they were at College 3. If I were going there to conduct some interviews, I'd spend some time trying to figure out what happened back there a decade or so ago that gave this faculty a sense of permission and drive that really drove them to innovate and create despite not having driving leadership at the time.

Core Team Leader 3

Core Team Leader 3, having worked at the college under both CEOs and as both a dean and as a vice president, having worked with the previous core team leader, and now serving as core team leader, had probably the broadest view of how leadership had engaged the college community around issues of increasing student success. Speaking generally about leadership and change, Core Team Leader 3 stated:

I talk about this often; real change is neither top-down nor bottom-up. It is all of the above. I think most folks on our campus would say that they feel very much empowered to talk about the issues, to bring issues up, to look at what the data says. We look at data as a yin-yang to be honest with you, and we're constantly crafting solutions and brainstorming strategies and coming up with ways to meet the challenges. Those are all very much bottom-up or middle-out ideas. However, when the rubber meets the road,
most of the strategies cost money and so the senior leadership has to make the budgetary decisions. Those are top-down decisions. Everybody wants and needs—and understandably so—more resources. We don't have unlimited resources.

Core Team Leader 3 went on to describe how the budget development process was an example of how the college currently functions in regard to empowerment. The budget team is composed of faculty, staff, junior leadership (or mid-level management), and senior leadership. The budget team are the ones who are crafting the strategies to meet the college’s enrollment targets. They make the projections for what enrollment might be in the next year. Those projections lead to the budget. In this way they are helping to craft the budget. Departments make their case as to why a particular department needs more, but ultimately the senior leadership has to make the decision. In this manner the budget, like much at the college, is not a product of top down management nor bottom up but a more collaborative and inclusive process.

Documents College 3

Empowerment is specifically called out in a number of places in the documents included in the study "Integrated Excellence." Leaders from all areas of the college are now empowered to improve the student experience. The collective efforts of the college community have contributed to an impressive ten percentage points increase in their graduation rate.

Theme Four: Effort on the Part of the CEO to Improve College Connections to Their Communities

The fourth theme to emerge as a practice of CEOs at the three LMAA-winning colleges examined in this study was effort on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to their communities. While ATD does not give direction regarding the building of external partnerships with local K-12 systems, universities and businesses, building those connections emerged as a
theme containing numerous individual practices of CEOs which were formative to all three colleges’ work to improve student success. External adaptation is clearly evident as a practice integral to all three LMAA CEOs’ leadership. Sustained and substantial effort to adapt to external conditions and inputs is evident in all nine interviews as well as supporting documents.

**Leadership Coach 1**

As part of their efforts to increase student success, College 1 put in place a number of collaborative programs to help more students transition successfully from high school to college and then on to a university or career. The programs include summer bridge programs, a locally endowed promise program, alignment of curriculum with the K-12 districts, and local business needs. The development of all of these programs is attributed to the CEO in all three interviews involving individuals associated with College 1.

Leadership Coach 1 frames the case here:

I have to tell you that the college-wide committees and CEO’s cabinet felt that the number [of students entering not ready for college level work] was too high. They felt that the college had a responsibility to reach out to the high schools to see how they could collaborate with the K through 12 institutions to have high school students be more college ready. They did that in a very strategic way. They established a partnership with the K through 12 institutions. English collaborated with faculty members and the English department at the high school, the administrators at CEO 1’s level and the cabinet level collaborated with the superintendents and their leaders, and they developed some very strategic plans to help decrease the number of students graduating from high school going into developmental ed. They did things like their summer boot camps, they did re-testing, some very strategic things that were directly linked to improving the numbers in terms of students being college ready.

When CEO 1 decided that College 1 was going to respond to the call for the completion agenda and identified the number of students needed to double the graduation rate by 2020, it became necessary to reallocate funds, which CEO 1 did within the general fund budget. CEO 1
also appealed to the K through 12 institutions. "You guys, if you want us to be able to be more responsive to these first-time-in college students, you guys need to man up too and bring some money to the table." CEO 1 challenged those K through 12 superintendents to put some money on the table, which they did.

The collaboration with K-12 that resulted is a significant part of what allowed College 1 to see the improvements in student success that led to College 1 winning the LMAA.

I don't know of another community college in the country that has developed and maintained, I should say, the kind of relationships that College 1 has with the K through 12 folks. I suspect it's so strong that should CEO 1 retire in the next couple of years, it's so systemic that it's going to stay after CEO 1 leaves because everybody owns it. They want it to be a part of their community.

Beyond the collaboration with K-12, College 1 also, as a part of strategic planning, looked at what was going on outside the institution. CEO 1 made it a priority to stay in close communication with business and industry. Additionally, CEO 1 engaged with the national conversation and became very involved with the American Association of Community College board of directors. CEO 1 provided the intimate knowledge about what's going on and what’s shaping the future locally, regionally, and at the state level, but also on the national and even the international level as well.

Referring to the scope and scale of the work the CEO and college had engaged in externally, Leadership Coach 1 stated:

We had the terminology “leader college,” and as a leader college, there are areas where the college has become very good at in terms of making sense out of what works and what doesn't work. I think for College 1, the area I see that they can continue to be the pioneer in is to take a look at that whole student experience, and when they look at the access piece, there is that preparation for the college piece, what type of collaborations that the college can engage with the K through 12 to help more students become
successful. I think they've identified a way to do that but I think in the future, they should continue that kind of work and then also do a publication on that so that other colleges can benefit from it. I see that as a major contribution to the field because it's something that all of the community colleges throughout the United States need to do better, and since College 1 is experienced and progressed with it, I see a major teaching role for them to help other institutions be more effective at it.

Core Team Leader 1

Core Team Leader 1 described a number of the interventions external to the college as well, such as several bridge programs for targeted, underserved populations: One Million Degree Scholars, that provides coaching and supports both personal and professional and mandatory tutoring for those students as they progress through college; and a college Promise Program, not exclusive to low income, underserved populations. The Promise Program is College 1’s version of programs that are developing nationally. Students from College 1’s high school districts who meet certain requirements such as attendance, community service, grades, and progress in high school, can earn a free semester of tuition at College 1, and within that first semester, if they maintain those same standards, they can earn a second semester, then a third semester, and a fourth semester. “I do think that's a...has a lot of potential, especially for low income students, to make a big difference.”

Speaking of how all of these programs came about Core Team Leader 1 stated:

CEO 1 likes to tell the story, and I like repeating it 'cause I think it's a great story and, really, a testament to how [CEO 1] operate telling the story of the first days as the president. CEO 1 made three phone calls to each of the districts superintendents that College 1 works with. And I think that was a big change from how College 1 operated with its high school partners in the past. And CEO 1 believed, as I do, that one of the best ways to increase success is to really have that connection between not only the community college and our K-12 partners but also the community college and our four-year partners, especially when you're looking at transfer and trying to make the transition from high school to college as seamless as possible.
The programs are all formal agreements between College 1 and its three high school districts and include data-sharing agreements. CEO 1 formed a board that has a board chair, a college president, and the three superintendents. There are committees that work on particular initiatives with the purpose of increasing college and career readiness within the college district. Several businesses contribute to the board’s work as well.

From my perspective…it's really about making our district students better ready for college and career where they come to College 1 right away, come to College 1 later, go somewhere else, and then come back to our community. It really is a way to improve the economic viability of our particular district. And I just think that is a really significant accomplishment of this president. And it has led to work in aligning our math and English curriculum from a high school to the college, and I think some of the our best numbers that we’ve seen in increased placements in college-level math and college level English are a direct result of these relationships that we’ve had with the high schools.

CEO 1

CEO 1 corroborated Core Team Leader 1 and Leadership Coach 1’s comments about external partnerships, but also emphasized the underlying reasons that these relationships are necessary:

We have a very robust partnership with K through 12 institutions that really embed a lot of our catch-up work in high school as opposed to putting it in college, and so we catch people a lot earlier in the process. We've made a major commitment to better understanding ourselves as an institution, issues of diversity and inclusion by hiring a special assistant to the president to serve as the champion for diversity and inclusion, and that's led to the development of resource groups inside the institution for African American employees, Hispanic, the LGBT community, the disabled community. So I think our whole sense of awareness about issues of sameness and differences has been heightened in the employee community, and we've been able to see that translate into better understanding of the classroom and the dynamics of the classroom.

Externally, we've worked with...I think our first five years, a lot of our work was in the external K through 12 space. We've developed a formal organization. That group has a board of four individuals, myself, the three superintendents, so the 12 high schools that send in to our institution. We have 7500 high school seniors. Over a year about 39% to 40% come to College 1, right out of high school.
Over the last eight years, this group of superintendents and CEO 1 developed organizations in which individuals from all of the involved institutions work on data together and build career pathways from high school to college together. The results are impressive. The need for remediation in math and English dropped almost 25% of the freshmen's need for remedial math as they were coming out of high schools. The program led to the equivalent of 1200 full-time high school students taking college credit courses in high school. Only 246 FTE were participating in college-level course work when they started.

Regarding College 1’s Promise Program:

They earn that scholarship by reaching certain benchmarks in attendance, quality of their grades, rigor of their course work, consistence to finish their course work and community service. And they have certain benchmarks they've got to meet. Freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior year. Senior year they reach those benchmarks, they graduate both college-ready and career-ready, and we finance their first semester of school. If they continue to reach the benchmarks while they're at College 1, we'll finance four semesters, 60 hours of credit, to those students. That is a direct result of the organization and the business partners that work with the superintendents and I to develop the criteria for the program.

We're currently about a million dollars short of the $10 million goal that we have to semi-endow the program. We'll meet that goal in September of this year, and we still have two full years of fundraising yet in from of us, so we think we can get to $12 or $13 million with this program….I'm convinced, personally, that's the future of public education in this country, that certainly it has to develop some sort of architecture that bridges in a much more disciplined, intentional way the work that's going on in the secondary school, the work that's going on in post-secondary school.

Leadership Coach 2

Leadership Coach 2 pointed out the work of CEO 2 to build the college’s partnerships with external stake holders.

CEO 2's very involved in relationships with universities, with community-based organizations, very much with K-12, and it just takes a great deal of energy and commitment in order to continue to develop new partnerships as well as to continue
nurturing the existing relationships that CEO 2 has with those stakeholders. CEO 2 is very much an external president, in addition to being a hands-on internal president.

**Core Team Leader 2**

Core Team leader 2, perhaps more familiar with CEO 2’s collaborative efforts external to the college, stated:

CEO 2’s signaling to our internal community that this was an important priority, but also messaging that to the external community as well, has been another really valuable thing that CEO 2's done that I think has helped to improve student outcomes. CEO 2's also talked...with our local political leaders and funders a lot, both with our county and with our state government. We get about a quarter of our funding from the state, and about a quarter from the county. CEO 2's been very good at talking about those things, and CEO 2's a very articulate and eloquent speaker, so that's been very effective in that regard. I would say with our trustees and our funders, CEO 2's been particularly involved in our student success work.

While CEO 2 has been very active in cultivating relationships with local grant agencies in relation to the college’s student success work, there has been less work with four-year schools. K-12 partnerships have increased with significant positive change in the number of early college enrollments.

**CEO 2**

CEO 2 spoke broadly about the value of increasing external partnerships and about the work of increasing student success but provided concrete examples of the productive increase of those partnerships during the CEO’s tenure.

We look at maximizing our capacity by maximizing connecting with others. By way of example, we've gone from having about five hundred early college access enrollments maybe three years ago. This year we'll probably have about 2500 early college enrollments. With K through 12 upward, with transfer partners and really across the community, the communities and the region. I'll give you one really good example that will illustrate this. Every individual in our county who wishes to apply for welfare must
sign up for College 1's job network program. It's a three-month program. It helps take people from welfare into jobs. Working closely with our county workforce development office and the social services in our region and the college, all of us together, we probably help somewhere between three, four, five thousand people each year go from being on welfare to earning a salary from a job. I mention that because there's no way College 2 could afford to do that all by itself. There's no way the workforce development folks would be able to do it. They have the money. They don't have the resources, the expertise. There's no way that the department of social services could do it on its own. You put the three of us together and you get an amazing partnership that produces a different kind of student success from what people talk about normally when they're talking about degree completion. That's the kind of investment that we make across the region to maximize our own ability to be helpful. Now I'll go back to the national piece. We're one of the colleges that, when we went through our economic challenges, we didn't lay off, we didn't solo, we didn't re-trench, we didn't cut travel. We just felt the field. Supporting our people is one of the most important things we can do to support student success.

CEO 2 also enumerated the college’s extensive involvement at the national level, with high numbers of faculty and administrators attending Achieving the Dream and League of Innovation, among other conferences.

Our people have to be on the cutting edge of what's being discussed out there. I like our people taking things like developmental acceleration out on the circuit. We know that over 200 colleges are using our model. That's wonderful, because students at 200 more colleges are going to develop, are going to benefit from the developments made possible by the intellectual and the hardworking people of College 1. Now we've got 200 other colleges using that same model. Think about that in terms of how many students have advanced more quickly through a developmental continuum because of College 2’s commitment to actually supporting innovation all in the name of what can we do better to help students be successful.

Leadership Coach 3

Leadership Coach 3 spoke of CEO 3’s efforts to reenergize the college foundation and move the foundation to being a significant source of revenue for the college and to improve College 3’s relationship with the local community, especially the K-12 system and university partnerships.
The previous CEO’s community involvement was an informal involvement. He knew everybody in town. He lived there for years. They were great buddies. The community thought highly of the college just because they liked the previous CEO. Then COE 3 came in. CEO 3 was much more formally connected with the K-12 community. There's a university center there that has a number of universities that come in and offer upper division coursework. CEO 3 formalized the connections with them much more. Employers became much more actively involved with the chamber and with the economic development group, and I think probably became in many ways the principal mover and shaker in the community in terms of thinking about where economic development could occur and how the college could play an active role in it. I would view that as CEO 3’s most significant contribution to College 3 since CEO 3 came in, really tightening and formalizing those community relationships.

Core Team Leader 3

Core Team Leader 3 expanded on leadership Coach 3’s comments about CEO 3’s extensive community involvement and expansion of the college foundation.

The CEO has to be the driver behind K-12 partnerships, so our president and our local school division's superintendents meet, converse regularly. Our university partnerships, our president sits on a council with our university partners, our local transfer institutions. Our president has a background of economic and employment development, so our employers and our community and faith-based organizations are very much involved, and that's again part of the presidential leadership. That's not to say that CEO 3 doesn't have significant help from the VP. CEO 3 does; that’s all part of our mission as well as vice presidents. CEO 3 has to be at the table for all of these, and CEO 3 recognizes that and has made a commitment to make sure that CEO 3 is.

Core Team Leader 3 described in detail his work with CEO 3 over the past year to share the college’s new six-year strategic plan with each of the college’s service regions, school divisions, and community partners. They shared what the performance targets will be for the next six years and what the benchmark goals are every year. “Not only-- this was, I think, very critically and a wise decision of our president--not only did we share what the institutional goals were, but we shared the data from the specific service region.”
The statewide goal for College 3’s state is to triple credentials earned over six years. If College 3 is to meet those targets, they believe strongly that they will need to work closely with their external partners.

The message that CEO 3 really…delivered was, here's our goals. Many of these goals were in fact given to us by the state, so when we looked at them, our message was, we can't get there without you all. We need your help in order for us to really maximize student success. Here's what the numbers are, here's where they need to be. Let's roll up our sleeves and get down to work to making this happen.

CEO 3

CEO 3 came into the community college system after a career in community development and running private businesses. Although College 3 was in ATD from the beginning, its focus before the arrival of CEO 3 in 2012 was primarily on remedial education reform and the expansion of collaborative learning within the college. A primary focus of CEO 3’s time at College 3 has been to develop community partnerships.

I have been very actively involved in the greater community in that strategic planning work, and began to formally bring that into being as part of the student achievement work. I became very actively involved in the community as an active player in community economic development, as part of my background was in community development. Where the college is located is very economically disadvantaged, with some of the highest unemployment rates in the state. I worked to reenergize the foundation, the college foundation, realigned resources and people, and we became very aggressive on grants. We have reached twice our state allocation in grants, which is currently $13 million.

CEO 3 also detailed involvement with the K-12 community. The college’s university center has a number of universities which offer courses and degrees on campus, so that students can take upper division coursework at the college. The role of employers became much more
involved with the chamber of commerce and with an economic development group. CEO 3
became very involved in the community in terms of thinking about where economic
development could occur and how the college could play an active role in it. “I have worked hard
to tighten and formalize community relationships.”

Theme Five: Significant Realignment of Resources for ATD Efforts

The fifth theme to emerge as a practice of CEOs at the three LMAA-winning colleges
examined in this study was significant realignment of resources for ATD efforts. All three CEOs
provided a clear signal to their colleges through the realignment of resources, reinforcing the
scale and significance of the desired change. All three CEOs defunded parts of their colleges that
were not aligned with the new goals, incentivizing the new goals with the realigned resources
and supporting the work with significant professional development opportunities. This fifth and
final theme to emerge as a salient practice of CEOs at LMAA-winning colleges is, as with the
themes above, evidenced in all nine interviews as well as in supporting documents.

Leadership Coach 1

Leadership Coach 1 presented in some detail the emphasis CEO 1 placed on realigning
resources in order to advance the work of increasing student success at College 1, noting that
CEO 1 continued to look for different approaches to promote student success throughout their
time at College 1. When CEO 1 sought additional external funding, that funding was directed
toward some aspect of student success.
CEO 1 looked to programs such as Title III, Trio programs, and other federal funding as well as local and national foundations to support student success work. CEO 1 also reallocated some of the existing resources that may be being used on programs that are not moving the student success efforts at the college.

For example, when CEO 1 decided that the college was going to respond to the completion agenda and had identified the number of students needed to double the graduation rate by 2020, the college decided it needed to reallocate funding in order to do so. CEO 1 did this within the general fund budget. CEO 1 also appealed to the K through 12 institutions to contribute resources, including funding, to the effort.

CEO 1 created a combined fund to improve the college readiness of those first-time-in college students.

CEO 1 has continued to do that throughout the time there at the college, always looking at the allocations that we have now in place--are they in the right place? Are the people? Do we need to reassign people? It wasn't just funding, it was also are we using our people in the best places for them to be effective as well?

Leadership Coach 1 also pointed out significant shifts in resources to expand work important to increasing student success as the college got started in its ATD efforts. CEO 1 did not only to look for new sources of money, they pursued grants such as Title Three, Trio programs, and other federal funding as well as local national foundations to promote student success.

CEO 1 took a look at existing resources to say how can we reallocate some of the existing resources that we have, that we may be expending on programs that are not
moving the student success needle and how do we reallocate those a more strategic way to get the work done. For example, very specific example here, when CEO 1 decided that they were gonna respond to the call for completion agenda and they identified the number of students that they needed to focus on in order to double the graduation rate by 2020, they decided they needed to reallocate some money and CEO 1 did within CEO 1’s own general fund budget…. CEO 1 continued to do that throughout the time that the data coach and I were there at the college always looking at are the allocations that we have now in place are they in the right place? Are the people, do we need to reassign people? It wasn't just funding it was also, are we using our people in the best places for them to be effective as well.

Core Team Leader 1

Core Team Leader 1 was able to supply more detail regarding resource allocation to increase student success. Core Team Leader 1 explained that CEO 1 had set aside $3 million to support strategic initiatives directly related to the college’s strategic plan and student access initiatives. Working teams can then apply to the core team or what College 1 calls their champion team to access some of those funds.

So they write up a proposal. It's reviewed. We determine what the initial use of those funds are, what that project might look like at scale, how we might fund a project like that at scale. But there has been designated money set aside supported by the board to specifically support student success initiatives. CEO 1 put their money where their mouth was. We have something out of our foundation called Resource For Excellence grants, and these are grants that people can apply for to help support kind of start-up ideas, one-time projects….I think education nationally, but particularly in our state, our funding is kind of a mess and we have limited funding, so I think we're being very careful and intentional about how we spend our money and what resources we have. So when it comes time to spend money, I think we ask questions about how it connects to some of our student success initiatives, and are making much more intentional decisions about using, not just institutional funds, but divisional and departmental funds in student access initiatives.

Another area highlighted by Core Team Leader 1 regarding resource allocation for increasing student success was that the majority of the foundation's fundraising efforts at College 1 are focused on the $13 million needed to endow the college’s Promise Program:

To make this program work and raise the funds needed for it--if the foundation did not
have some direction or some commitment to it and continued to raise money without a focus on the Promise Program I don't know how effective it would've been, but there's a very clear focus message that this was something that we were going to do, and I think it has led a lot to how successful the fundraising has been to this point and I think also a testament to a really good foundation leader in our college, too.

CEO 1

CEO 1 explained that the college thinks about strategic funds separately from operating funds.

We have an operational budget, annual budget about $125 million. When I first came here I suggested to the board that we take $3 million and put it in a strategic investment fund that could provide a source of funds for us to try out pilots intended to improve our student success outcomes over the course of the first five years, and we would finance that work out of the pilots. Pilots that we thought were making a difference we then moved to scale and once we moved them to scale we funded them in the operational budget. So thus they no longer became strategic, but they just became a way of doing business. A good example of that is the early work we did with the Starfish early alert system when it was first developed. Now that's at scale and part of our operating budget, but initially it was funded out of the strategic funding funds.

CEO 1 detailed how College 1 was able to receive a multi-million dollar Title III grant and how they used that grant to model and pilot for students an advising and analysis student process that the college is now taking to scale.

CEO 1 explained:

We also used some of those funds and coupled them with an institutional match to invest in software and hardware and a data warehouse that would allow us to, when we got to scale, to be able to really understand what of our interventions were the most powerful and the most predictive, so we could bring it to the whole student body. So it's probably safe to say that our strategy has been to try to do what we've been doing and continue to produce the same results on that operating budget, and then find ways to improve that effort through a careful use of strategic funds that were one-time moneys or maybe two-time moneys if we needed a couple trial runs and then move that to a scale on our campus.
As the college starts its second strategic plan, work that was piloted is now being taken to scale across the student body.

This was very helpful to me both in this presidency and the last, to not ask people to try to dream without giving them some source of funds to try out their dream. And I've found that when I try to finance that out of the operating budget, it really causes lots of disruption and causes people a lot of pain, because then they're trying to decide, do I take risk and give up something I'm doing that I know works at least at this level of success, and on the side try out this new thing and see if we can replace the old thing.

CEO 1 explained that the strategic team runs the allocation of finances for the plan through a steering committee composed of three executives and three faculty.

The faculty president and two of the executive committee members and two of our vice presidents in a steering committee, we call them the champion team, for the strategic plan, I convene every two weeks to monitor and measure the work that we're doing, and …they then recommend to me what projects should be funded out of our strategic initiatives money, and 100 times out of 100 that's where the money goes.

Leadership Coach 2

Leadership Coach 2 detailed how CEO 2 had been very successful at moving resources in order to support initiatives which are increasing student success at College 2.

One of my favorite sayings is people find a way to pay for things that are important to them. When you put student success at the top of your agenda, then you show your commitment by using resources, available resources, both fiscal and human, in order to make those things work. CEO 2 has certainly done that and continues to do that at a time over these years when there have been some tight fiscal times, with the college budget. It is really a commitment from the top when it comes to being willing to fund the activities, fund the staffing, find ways to move human resources around in order to make those efforts fruitful--where they put the money, where they put their effort, how they go about making changes, very, very, very much data informed.
Core Team Leader 2

Core Team Leader 2 reiterated and expanded on what Leadership Coach 2 had stated, explaining that CEO 2 had been very receptive to new initiatives to increase student success and had been willing to spend the money at the front end to do something that would generate student success, anticipating that the increased retention would generate revenue in the medium term and in the longer term.

CEO 2’s made sure that we have the money to do the basic things that we wanted to do, the scheduling of the accelerated dev ed classes, starting a mandatory one-credit student orientation and student success course for all students new to college, which is most of our students coming in. CEO 2 funded that…. CEO 2 has helped to fund the Pathways, seeing as that's the heart of our student success approach, or the Pathways approach. So I would say that CEO 2’s been very supportive in that regard. Also supportive of grant work that we've done in relation to our student success work, and we've had a number of grants that have helped to foster that as well.

Core Team Leader 2 explained that in College 2’s state, colleges are not allowed to have more than 2% held year to year in reserve, complicating the tricky terrain of funding student success initiatives. “We don't really have reserve money, so it's really a question of building it into the budget. Then I guess in that sense, you could say that we have found other ways, other sources of funding within the college where we refocused our finances.”

Core Team Leader 2 also detailed how CEO 2 made sure that substantial enough resources were set aside to assure that the planning resources and evaluation office was well-funded and supported by community college standards.

Probably the main way that CEO 2’s done this has been through their support for our culturally responsive teaching program, which is very large, and again, funded by a lot of faculty reassign time, as well as...we have a national conference that we've been running now for the last three years on our culturally responsive teaching program. CEO 2’s been involved in funding that and making sure that that got off the ground. Supporting faculty
reassign time to make sure that that happens. And CEO 2 has just agreed, for example, to our proposal that, at our all-college event next spring, which we'll hold in late January of 2018, that the topic be about equity and about what we can do to close the racial achievement gap at College 2. CEO 2’s been responsive to the initiatives that...again I would say, not developing those initiatives, but responsive and supporting the initiatives that have been brought to CEO 2 on that front.

Core Team Leader 2 has focused, in the context of both internal and external communication, on the need to allocate resources toward efforts to increase student success.

It is really a stated mission of the college. Student success for the last six years has been one of our three or four key mission tasks, and I think that the CEO has been supportive of that verbally, and that's important, because CEO 2 helps to set the agenda for the college, and helps to signal the people to faculty and staff, what is important and what is going to be judged to be important, and CEO 2's also been very valuable in terms of making sure that we add the resources necessary to carry out the things we wanted to do.

CEO 2

CEO described how CEO 2 re-envisioned the work of College 2’s foundation.

When I described our re-structuring at the executive level, one of the positions that I created was an advancement officer. I wanted to...let me say it differently. I did not want to hire a community college advancement officer. We found instead a very talented guy, African American fellow who's worked at HBCUs. That's the kind of experience that I thought we needed on the advancement side.

Describing the success of the foundation work since this restructuring:

Our college has gone from, let's say ten years ago, maybe in a given year we might raise a couple hundred thousand dollars. We are easily now raising seven, eight, nine, ten million dollars a year. We're just finishing this spring something we call the New Beginnings Campaign. We've been doing this for seven years. We just started the public facet two years ago. We set our sights on raising $42 million. We will, I'm pretty sure, top $52 million.

CEO 2 went into extensive detail regarding the reallocation of operating dollars to support strategic initiatives such as ATD in light of the state’s limitation on holding funds in reserve from year to year, and to make sure that the process is as transparent as possible to the
We do have to work a little harder to find or to identify or redistribute funds to make sure the academic and the enrollment and student service officers are there working closely together on this pathways initiative. They're doing a fantastic job. They need money to do it. Every year, we have a special list. Each vice president can add things to that list to, say, with the half million dollars we have to distribute. In the end, I will always play Solomon and cut the baby in half if I need to, to make sure that these are things we're identifying as key to student success. This is part of the way our executive staff works. Everything is on the table. There's never a secret deal between me and the administrative officer or between her and the enrollment guy. It's all on the table. That's where we make these decisions. I actually think that we work pretty hard to make sure these decisions are transparent. The thing I don't want is for faculty, especially, to get annoyed or angry or feel disenfranchised because they have been working hard on a pathway project. In the end, we can't pay for it. We like to be really upfront. We work together as a team to make sure that if we've said something is a priority, it's key to students' success. We have got to strengthen our ability financially to do what is right for students.

Leadership Coach 3

Leadership Coach 3 detailed that CEO 3 found the college in quite serious financial shape at first. There was a period of very serious budget examination, and CEO 3 insisted that student success be the basis for all budgetary decisions.

I don't know that CEO 3 went to a zero-based budgeting approach, but something akin to that. Every division had to begin to justify its budget based on demonstrating what it would do for student outcomes. Over the next couple of years, CEO 3 brought the college back to a fairly stable fiscal position, but the focus always remained on assuring that what we were involved in was focusing on student outcomes.

Core Team Leader 3

Core Team Leader 3 was able to fill in many of the details as to what had transpired regarding the allocation of resources to support student success initiatives.

I'm also going to articulate the fact that funding the efforts to maximize student success means recrafting the budget. That again, even though there is a VP of finance, the CEO, at least in an institution our size, has to be very much in-the-weeds with that because if
the VP has one agenda and the CEO has another agenda, then those agendas won't mesh with clarity of focus around student success. The VP is in charge of the budget, if you will, the VP of finance ... it is the president's vision of crafting this to maximize student success that frames that budget, if that makes sense.

Core Team Leader 3 detailed the limitations placed on their institutions by the state and the challenges this poses:

All colleges in our state system, which has governance and oversight in policy making. We don't set our own financial policy in terms of reserves and things like that. No college is allowed to have more than a 2% reserve from year to year. It causes a lot of challenges. You could be very, very savvy during one fiscal year and have a good deal of money left over at the end of the year, and if you do you have to give it all back. The maximum that you can carry forward is 2% of your budget, which quite frankly is very, very small. That policy in and of itself creates some extreme challenges. Well, in an economy and in the climate where the state has cut the budget and where enrollment is declining, that means making hard, hard decisions about cutting X so that you can fund Y, because Y is showing to have significant financial impact upon the institution, and furthermore having significant data results. With that comes greater responsibility, and great demands for output. With this increased funding for that department, they've got a lot more on their shoulders now and our president and other senior leadership team members are requesting and requiring more and more on a daily basis from them for data, to really inform our decision making process.

CEO 3

CEO 3 described realigning resources and people very aggressively at the beginning, likewise pursuing grants: “…twice the state allocation, which is currently 13 million.” CEO 3 described the impact of realigning college resources on retention effort therefore the college’s bottom line:

Number one, it has been a challenge at our college, like all community colleges. The national fall-to-fall retention rate is less than 45% across the country. Ours hovers around 48-49%, so we're above average, but what that means is that we lose one of every two students from fall to fall. They don't graduate, they don't transfer, they just don't come back. That has monstrous economic impact upon our institution. When I look at the economic challenges and right-sizing our college in terms of a budget, and then also look at our enrollment challenges...what we all realize is that all of these problems will be beautifully addressed if we increase our fall-to-fall retention. We'll have greater
enrollment—we say all the time, it's easier to retain a student than to attract a new one. We'll have greater financial stability, because with fall-to-fall retention comes financial stability. We will have greater completion rates and greater transfer rates, because with fall-to-fall retention comes greater transfer and completion rates.

**College 3 Documents**

In 2010, the college's trustees approved the reallocation of $3.28 million of the operating budget to support innovation and scaling of student success efforts.

**Summary of Results**

This qualitative, multi-case study investigated leadership practices used to increase student success through sustaining innovation at three Achieving the Dream leader colleges, resulting in the winning of the annual Leah Meyer Austin Award. This chapter presented the research findings from the responses of CEOs, ATD core team leaders, and ATD leadership coaches in regard to leadership practices that led to improved student success.

The purpose of this chapter was to present evidence of CEOs’ practices that brought about significant change in student outcomes as defined by the Achieving the Dream (ATD) national community college reform network’s stated objectives of creating a culture of evidence, raising retention and completion rates, and closing achievement gaps within community colleges. The chapter presented evidence of five themes or broad categories of leadership practices used by CEOs which have contributed to significant movement in student outcomes. The three colleges examined here are all winners of the LMAA. Living systems theory as a theoretical framework was used to develop an open-ended research question: What leadership practices were evident in CEOs’ actions that helped move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA winners?
I collected data via Skype interviews with the CEO, core team leaders, and leadership coaches at three recent LMAA-winning colleges. The three community college CEOs who committed themselves, their core team leader, and leadership coach to participate came from colleges that varied in situation and size. Each participant (CEO, core team leader, leadership coach) was asked the same questions regarding leadership but with the questions rephrased according to each participant’s role (see Appendix A). I took notes during the interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the recordings were archived on a laptop and external hard drive for security purposes. Analysis of the data led to identification of five key themes.

Once each of the first and second coding cycles was completed, I identified categories from a review of the collected data. I recorded each individual code title using the NVivo software and arranged them all into categories. As a result, the codes were consolidated into logical categories corresponding to, first, the themes revealed during the literature review and, second, to emergent themes. The research question for this study provided a framework to present the results of the narrative analysis of the transcribed data set, the interviews, and post-transcription memos. Characteristic of the case study method, a “thick description” of the data was provided to support the validity of findings of this study (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

This resulted in the five themes that were derived from the analysis, the categories, coding, and sample responses from the interviewees. The quotations presented represent the actual responses by the interviewees to the interview questions and were not edited for correct grammar. The combination of the categories and related quotes from the interviewees led to the natural development of the following five themes.

1. Communication of the importance of improving student outcomes to the college
2. Commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision making

3. Empowerment by the CEO of college personnel to lead institutional change efforts

4. Clear emphasis on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to their communities

5. Significant financial commitment to ATD efforts.
Chapter V: Discussion

Summary of the Study

The first chapter outlined the focus, purpose, and significance of the study. The second chapter was a literature review exploring four themes related to leadership and change which emerged from the existing research. The first of these themes is that systems thinking is a vital trait for today’s community college leaders if they are to enact the systemic changes needed. The second theme is that leadership practices inherent in systematic change are the following: having an abundance mindset, taking risks and supporting followers, being collaborative, being principle-centered, being able to move fluidly within a multidimensional leadership model, sensemaking and sensegiving, creating a sense of leader’s knowledge of self, and having the ability to develop trust. The third theme is the processes which leaders must foster which are endemic to institutional change. The fourth theme was that college CEOs are essential agents in promoting a culture of change. The methodology used for the study was outlined in Chapter Three and the analysis of nine interviews with three ATD leadership coaches, 3 core team leaders, and 3 CEOs followed in Chapter Four.

Living systems theory served as the theoretical framework and guided the development of the interview questions as well as providing insight for data analyzed. Chapter Five ties the findings to both the literature review and living systems theory. Conclusions around the implications for action and recommendations for future research are presented.

The challenges that community colleges face are real. They compete for a decreasing share of tax dollars while expectations of the effective use of those dollars increase. Success indicators such as retention and completion rates are low. The gaps in achievement levels for
first-generation, low-income students and students of color persist, exacerbating societal inequities (Kezar & Eckel, 2008). Communicating these challenges to the constituent groups that make up the living systems that we call community colleges is not easy. If leaders can effectively communicate these issues, the systems can be moved from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium, setting the stage for the work of internal integration and external adaptation (O’Banion, 2012).

Living systems theory offers a useful framework for understanding how community colleges function and how they interact with the larger suprasystem, providing a common language and conceptual framework for understanding the need for disequilibrium to spur internal integration in order to adapt to external demands. Living systems theory also offers insight into the necessary leadership conditions by which efforts such as those made possible through ATD can be most effectively applied as a catalyst of change and was particularly useful for this study of colleges that have made significant change resulting in increased levels of student success (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; O’Banion, 2012). Without these necessary conditions of creating a sense of disequilibrium and moving the institution toward internal integration, ATD or other reform efforts will not be successful (Youngblood, 1998). The processes above were evident at the colleges included in this study. Additionally, the CEOs in this study leveraged a strong sense of mission and ATD’s assistance to learn to use institutional data as a means of creating urgency about the institution’s failure to meet the demands being placed on it by the larger society. All CEOs included in this study, despite the disparate size of the institutions, were able to move from a role atop a hierarchy to that of facilitators of communication and movers of information amongst a web of actors, enabling substantial and meaningful change at all three colleges.
Through this theoretical lens, the purpose of this study was to identify what practices CEOs at select ATD colleges used to achieve significant positive increases in student outcomes as measured by increases in retention and completion as defined by ATD. Significant change has been defined by the ATD national community college reform network as creating a culture of evidence, raising retention and completion rates, and closing achievement gaps within community colleges. This study identifies leadership practices of CEOs at selected institutions which have contributed to significant movement in ATD’s five key indicators: (a) increase retention rates, (b) increase precollege course completion rates, (c) increase completion rates of initial college-level or gatekeeper courses in subjects such as math and English, (d) increase college level course completion, and (e) increase credential attainment.

The three colleges included in this study have met the highest standards set by ATD for institutional change and measurable positive movement in ATD’s five key indicators. Colleges with significant change for this study are defined as those that have been awarded leader college status within the ATD network, indicating meaningful movement on ATD’s five key indicators at a scale that impacts all students at the institution. An additional threshold of significant change was used: Only colleges that have also won the ATD Leah Meyer Austin Award (LMAA) were included in this study, as the award signifies the highest degree of quantifiable institutional change as defined by ATD. This award annually recognizes an ATD institution that has demonstrated outstanding progress in achieving organizational and cultural change in pursuit of a student-success vision that integrates all of its individual efforts into a cohesive strategy. Twelve colleges have thus far been awarded the LMAA since its initial award in 2009 (Achieving the Dream, 2017).
By identifying these effective leadership practices, this qualitative study will aid future leaders in adopting effective leadership practices that will help to move more ATD and non-ATD colleges to more quickly and effectively increase student retention and completion and reduce achievement gaps within the context of the student completion agenda (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). The colleges included here have quantifiable improvements in student outcomes as defined and documented by ATD. Through a qualitative case study process, this study endeavors to dig deeper into what allowed these colleges to make such substantial improvement by attempting to identify leadership practices formative to this level of institutional change.

**Research Question**

This study addressed the following research question: What leadership practices were evident in CEOs’ actions that helped move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA winners?

**Review of the Methodology**

I applied a qualitative case study research method through a living systems theory lens to conduct interviews and analyze documents in an exploratory study. This allowed me to examine leadership practices made evident by CEOs in the process of becoming ATD leaders and LMAA-winning colleges. A qualitative research method was used to conduct interviews and review documents to gain insight and an understanding of leadership practices employed to increase student success through sustained innovation as implied by ATDs criteria for selecting LMAA winners.
Major Findings

I used an intentional, interpretive/constructivist philosophical approach in which I created knowledge through the interactions with the leadership coaches, core team leaders, and CEOs. Repeated reviews of the memos created immediately following each interview, the transcribed data sets, the post-transcription memos, and the results from the first and second coding cycles developed categories into five themes.

The analysis of the interview transcript and supporting documents led to the emergence of the following themes or categories of practices: (a) communicating the importance of improving student outcomes to the college community, (b) commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision making, (c) empowerment by the CEO of college personnel to lead institutional change efforts, (d) clear emphasis on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to their communities, (e) significant realignment of resources for ATD efforts.

Theme One: Communicating the Importance of Improving Student Outcomes to the College Community

Theme One, communicating the importance of improving student outcomes to the college community, clearly emerges as one of the key practices of all three CEOs of successful LMAA-winning colleges. All three CEOs clearly signaled through verbal and written communication the link between key organizational resource discussions and positive impacts on student outcomes. Evidence of this is present in all nine interviews and is summarized below along with 18 specific practices identified in the work of the three CEOs included in this study. According
to Prochaska and Diclemente (1992), leaders must communicate to the workforce why the organizational change is personally relevant and meaningful to individual employees. Communicating institutional change challenges the constituent groups that make up the living systems that we call community colleges. Kotter (1996) described the need to create a sense of urgency to ready the system for change, which is largely accomplished through the messaging of the CEO. An important step in the process of creating a sense of disequilibrium at all three colleges was the sharing of disaggregated institutional retention and completing data widely and repeatedly. Additionally, O Banion (2012) and Katz (1997) emphasized that if leaders can effectively communicate the importance of changing the system for better student outcomes, the systems can be moved from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium, setting the stage for the work of internal integration and external adaptation.

Not only did this theme align well with existing literature, it also aligned well with the instruction given to colleges by ATD. ATD places the role of the CEO of each community college or community college district at the fore of their model of cultural change and continuous improvement. Messaging from leadership is salient to any meaningful institutional change (Kezar, 2013; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). While the preponderance of evidence within the interviews is presented in Chapter IV, some highlights are presented here.

Throughout the interviews, it became evident that all three CEOs took to heart their roles as chief communicators amongst a system of actors within their colleges. Moreover, this role extended to the external suprasystem in which these colleges are imbedded. By way of example, Core Team Leader 2 spoke at length on the strength of CEO 2 in communicating the importance of increasing student success. “It's a constant. CEO 2 talks about it at every possible turn. It is
definitely no question around the institution and outside the institution where CEO 2 is in terms of student success.” And this was affirmed by CEO 2:

The two things I can speak and I can write….I use both of those skills to try to influence, inspire, encourage our people every time I have an opportunity to speak to them….We make sure people understand why we're doing what we're doing or why we're asking what we're asking…it is very important to be on message about student success. I try to be present, I try to be everywhere I try to be everywhere in the community….

The evidence for Theme One was well summarized by Core Team Leader 3, who stated,

If you don't have the CEO on board, you're not going to have significant gains. We saw that. We are living testimony of that. In order to really maximize what Achieving the Dream is about, you've got to have the CEO onboard from the get-go. That CEO frankly has to be driving the train.

Theme One is composed of the aggregate practices identified within the nine interviews conducted for this study. Listed below are the 17 practices the three CEOs in this study used in moving their colleges to LMAA status.

- Utilized empirical benchmarks established by ATD, external sources, and/or internally derived to delineate and quantity increase in student success and focus the institution on an achievable yet aspirational set of goals
- Created a sense of urgency about needed change
- Encouraged the formation of a “coalition of the willing” to lead and execute the work on increasing student success
- Communicated at all scales with all constituencies inside and outside the institution
- Encouraged those engaged in the work to “stand on the shoulders of giants,” leveraging learning from best practices of other institutions
- Systematically and habitually communicated progress to meeting empirical
benchmarks/goals/targets to the college community

- Remained transparent about what is working and what is not working in efforts to increase student success
- Worked to have the majority of constituents buy into efforts to increase student success
- Clearly tied efforts to increase student success to strategic plan/mission statement, which was developed in a collaborative manner
- Encouraged the development of feedback loops that allowed for the abandonment of what was not working
- Clearly signaled that they are in for the long haul (10-year commitment)
- Communicated through resource allocation the importance of increasing system performance
- Maintained a high degree of credibility with the college community by consistently acting with integrity
- Noticeably and consistently communicated with the board of trustees the need to increase student success
- Intentionally promoted a student success agenda
- Engaged as directly as possible and as frequently as possible with the college community
- Was the college champion of the effort to increase student success
Figure 5.1: Theme One: Communicating the Importance of Improving Student Outcomes to the College Community and Constituent Leadership Practices
Theme Two: Commitment on the Part of the CEO to Increase the Use of Data to Inform Decision Making

The second theme to emerge as a practice of CEOs at the three LMAA-winning colleges examined in this study was commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision making. This is an important component of ATD’s prescribed methodology for institutional change and again was evident as a practice of all three CEOs as demonstrated by excerpts from all nine interviews. ATD encourages each institution to look at institutional data to understand the problems and challenges it faces related to improving student outcomes as a whole while closing achievement gaps. As they begin to work with ATD, colleges see their institutional retention and completion rates longitudinally and disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, income, and many other criteria. This process allows each college to see that the current situation within their institutions is not acceptable (Broxson, 2016; Gonzales, 2012). The premise for this within the ATD process is that, if communicated effectively, this data can be utilized to make better decisions. From a living systems theory perspective, the system becomes prepared for change, moved from a sense that everything is OK, or equilibrium, to a sense that in light of the data everything must change, or a state of disequilibrium in which change is imperative (Achieving the Dream, 2016; Kezar, 2013).

The three LMAA-winning colleges in this study have developed a deep capacity to collect analyze, communicate, and act on data. It is evident from the interviews as well as analysis of available documents that using increasing data capacity and communicating progress toward goals is a seminal practice of CEOs at LMAA-winning colleges. A deep and broad discussion of the importance of data in the process of improving and shortening feedback loops within their
institutions and the relevance of this cultural shift to the increase in student success can be seen at all three colleges. While the preponderance of evidence within the interviews is presented in Chapter Four, some highlights are presented here.

Leadership Coach 1 tied the pervasive use of data in decision making at College 1 directly to their success:

I think that really is what set them apart in terms of being able to be very strategic about their work. They didn't censor their data, they said okay that does not look good, it's not where we want to be, but we're not gonna hide it. I'm not sure that people appreciated that to the extent possible about CEO 1’s leadership. CEO 1 wasn't about trying to make people feel good about the data in that regard, and I'm sure CEO 1 took some grief about it early on, but now I sense that people appreciate it more.

Core Team Leader 1 ascribed this pervasive use of data directly to the actions of the CEO:

“But I think a lot of what we do now is driven by a lot of the data on retention, what students need, where the stopping out points are, and I really do think that's been a significant contribution of this particular president.” Core Team Leader 2 stated that CEO 2 “talks about the colleges successes or failures in light of the data, and what that data indicates, and has been a kind of a person that is generally persuaded by data, and people know that; that CEO 2's generally persuaded by data.” CEO 2 summarized the college’s efforts to become more data driven in its decision making this way:

I would say we've moved well away from the old models community colleges were pretty good at. That is anecdotal proof. I had a student who did, I had a student who said, I had three students who.... We still talk that way sometimes but we don't make decisions that way. Anybody at this institution who wishes, has access to data. We're data driven. It's a very trite phrase, but we are.
CEO 3 went so far as to state that the ability to lead using data will be a crucial skill set for the next generation of presidents as they attempt to nudge the system to higher levels of student success.

I firmly believe that data collection and data analysis is a crucial skill set for the next generation of presidents. It’s usually very obvious in the data what is not working; being able to act on these signals is very important. The new generation of presidents understands data and how it drives everything you do. Not a part of my generation’s thinking, but my background in business and community development helped prepare me to use data effectively.

Theme Two is composed of the aggregate practices identified within the nine interviews conducted for this study. Listed below are the 20 practices the three CEOs in this study used in moving their colleges to LMAA status.

- Facilitated the development of a transparent and collaborative data environment
- Took time through their strategic planning process to identify key priorities and define those priorities based on a careful analysis of college data
- Learned to utilize not only the institutions’ own data but data from feeder institutions and peer/inspirational institutions.
- Encouraged the collection data with the purpose of informing the college of student success progress
- Made increasing the scope of work for institutional research and institutional effectiveness a priority
- Increased resources available for data collection, including the number of staff in IR/IE/IT
- Used data to evaluate and improve areas within their colleges
• Made it a priority to help increase access, analysis, and reporting of data

• Made sure data was getting into the hands of those most likely to be able to leverage that data into significant institutional change

• Reflected on all of the data, and not just the positive or flattering data

• Invested in technology systems to collect data to increase student support

• Currently focused on scheduling tools and predictive analytics to begin moving data beyond administrators and faculty and into the hands of students

• Continuously tracked progress against goals and benchmarks

• Modeled data-informed leadership for the college community

• Framed success or failure in light of data

• Made a quick transition to a pervasive use of data early in CEOs’ tenure

• Used data to inform decisions that are made with the cabinet

• Did not just uncritically follow the data but weighed insights against mission and values of the institution

• Constantly looked for new and better metrics against which to measure efforts to increase student success

• Leveraged data skills acquired outside of academia in the community college system.
Figure 5.2: Theme Two: Commitment on the Part of the CEO to Increase the Use of Data to Inform Decision Making

Theme Two: Commitment on the Part of the CEO to Increase the Use of Data to Inform Decision Making

- Facilitated the development of a transparent and collaborative data environment
- Leveraged skills acquired outside of academia in the community college system
- Did not uncritically follow the data but weighed insights against mission and values of the institution
- Used data to inform decisions that are made with the cabinet
- Made a quick transition to a pervasive use of data early in CEOs' tenure
- Framed success or failure in light of data
- Modeled data-informed leadership for the college community
- Continuously tracked progress against goals and benchmarks
- Invested in technology systems to collect data to increase student support
- Reflected on all of the data, and not just the positive or flattering data
- Encouraged the collection of data with the purpose of informing the college of student success progress
- Made increasing the scope of work for institutional research and institutional effectiveness a priority
- Increased resources available for data collection, including the number of staff in IR/IE/IT
- Made it a priority to help increase access, analysis, and reporting of data
- Made sure data was getting into the hands of those most likely to be able to leverage that data into significant institutional change
- Currently focused on developing tools and predictive analytics to begin moving data beyond administrators and faculty and into the hands of students
- Framed success or failure in light of data
- Constantly looked for new and better metrics against which to measure efforts to increase student success
- Took time through their strategic planning process to identify key priorities and define those priorities based on a careful analysis of college data
- Learned to utilize not only the institutions' own data but data from feeder institutions and peer/institutional institutions
- Did not just uncritically follow the data but weighed insights against mission and values of the institution
- Encouraged the collection of data with the purpose of informing the college of student success progress
- Made increasing the scope of work for institutional research and institutional effectiveness a priority
Theme Three: Empowerment by the CEO of College Personnel to Lead Institutional Change Efforts

The third theme to emerge as a practice of CEOs at the three LMAA-winning colleges examined in this study was empowerment of college personnel to lead institutional change efforts. Kotter (2006, 2008, 2014) concluded that one of the keys to successful change is the empowerment of individuals from throughout the institutional hierarchy to engage in and lead the work. As Kotter (2014) and Malm (2008) pointed out, a leader who relies simply on a hierarchical structure will not succeed. If faculty, staff, deans, and directors are empowered to lead outside the traditional hierarchy and recommend the implementation of interventions that will alter existing practice and policy, real change and improvement is possible (Kezar, 2013; O’Banion, 2012; Wheatley, 2001; Wolverton, Gmelch, Montez, & Nies, 2001; Youngblood, 1998). Rogers (2003) stressed that it is important for all members of the system's knowledge to be utilized; specialized knowledge is crucial to the goal of achieving internal integration. Such a distributed leadership model helps shorten feedback loops and elicits buy-in from all constituencies. Ultimately, as Katz (1997) pointed out, this enables not just good decision making but sensemaking and ownership of change throughout the institution, internally integrating the system and allowing the institution to adapt to external expectations and assert its self-organizing or autopoietic nature. Empowerment of individuals by the CEO from across each college’s hierarchy to engage in the work of improving student outcomes is a clear salient practice, evidence for which exists at all three colleges. While the preponderance of evidence within the interviews is presented in Chapter Four, some highlights are presented here.
Leadership Coach 1 described empowerment as central to the success of College 1.

I think that I would say that was a very visionary approach by the president to understand and realize there was talent at that college that he could tap into. CEO 1 was able to and understood the need to have broader engagement and invited more people to become a part of the leadership of those initiatives and CEO 1 got some results as a result of that.

And empowerment is integral to how the college functions:

I think that there was an empowerment culture throughout the whole process….I'm saying that there was an empowerment culture. I do believe that their avenues, platforms with the institution that various stakeholders could reach out to, have access to and feel that they were making a valuable contribution to the institution.

Leadership Coach 1 also made clear the importance of the processes of empowerment with shortened and redundant feedback loops to be embedded within the college’s structures.

They've taken the mystery out of how to get engaged. They have excellent feedback loops to stakeholders to say this is what we said we were gonna do, this is what we did, and this is how it worked. That's real clear; they've done that extremely well in terms of stakeholder groups. I think they've also given voice to some of the underserved people inside the institution in terms of staff and faculty and staff of color. I see more people emerging and participating in campus activities than in previous years.

Core Team Leader 2 reinforced these views regarding empowerment of individuals at various levels within the college hierarchy.

This is a truly a collaborative process that we're engaged in. So it sounds a little trite to say titles are gone, positions are gone, the hierarchy is gone. But when we're working on those initiatives, we try to get the right people in the room, try to create environment where everybody feels comfortable contributing and the ideas are freely shared.

CEO 2 also clearly supported a culture of empowerment at their college:

I definitely feel that empowerment is one of their [vice presidents’] most important tasks….It's taking the fertile ideas of the people who do this work and really giving them an environment and an opportunity to participate….Before you know it, we have buy-in that truly I didn't imagine we could get when I came here as the chancellor.
CEO 2 explained in detail their own view regarding empowerment of individuals within the institution to engage in and carry out the work of retooling the college to increase student success:

One of my own biases is that I think leadership needs to be practiced at every level. Whether it's the custodian or the union steward or the computer technician, they all need to really understand why they're here. They might be ancillary to what happens in the classroom. That never means that the faculty are the most important people. It just means the faculty are in the classroom and all the rest of us are outside it. We all need to be supporting....I talk about this often. Real change is neither top-down nor bottom-up. It is all of the above. I think most folks on our campus would say that they feel very much empowered to talk about the issues, to bring issues up, to look at what the data says.

Theme Three is composed of the aggregate practices identified within the nine interviews conducted for this study. Listed below are the 19 practices the three CEOs in this study used in moving their colleges to LMAA status.

- Became more inclusive as time with ATD work passed
- Distributed leadership through priority or action teams
- Empowered leadership with the intend of leveraging the collective knowledge of the institution to increase student success
- Enabled the ability to assess progression through continuous assessment by those doing the work
- Encouraged all to embrace empirically based feedback on success and failures of efforts
- Validated a process to change in the institution that is not only inclusive but highly transparent and fair
- Used the process of empowerment to identify, mentor, develop, and promote leaders.
- Intentionally engaged underrepresented populations within the college
• Created a sensitive, non-threatening environment where constituents felt they could participate without prejudice
• Formally assessed college environment for internal perception of empowerment and inclusion
• Continuously collected and assessed stakeholder feedback
• Clearly communicated how everyone, no matter their formal role, can contribute to the effort to increase student success
• Created a collaborative work environment through a shared governance process
• Worked to increase participation in change initiatives amongst college personnel
• Strategically moved faculty into leadership positions on institutional change initiatives
• Delegated some of the responsibility to communicate progress to stakeholders
• Was determined to reach consensus with college stakeholders regarding student success priorities
• Willingly committed to collective sensemaking with the college community
• Used resource allocation as an affirmation of empowerment
Figure 5.3: Theme Three: Commitment on the Part of the CEO to Increase the Use of Data to Inform Decision Making
Theme Four: Effort on the Part of the CEO to Improve College Connections to Their Communities

The fourth theme to emerge as a practice of CEOs at the three LMAA-winning colleges examined in this study was effort on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to their communities. A crucial role of the CEO is to set the stage and to provide the vision of what must change, why it must change, and what is required of the system for continued external integration. It is critical that other senior leaders reporting to the CEO share this vision of systemic change and of internal integration to achieve external adaptation, and then use their control of resources to signal their commitment to making the necessary changes. As Bridgeforth noted (2005), the first precondition for meaningful change is external adaptation, which addresses the mission and purpose of the system; the second is internal integration, which addresses the internal functioning of the system. Ideally, these can lead to a state of dynamic equilibrium. Periods of change necessitate input that creates disequilibrium and the conditions for growth and adaptation (Burke, 2014; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kezar, 2013).

While the necessary changes require different actions on the parts of all who come into contact with students, without internal integration that modifies underlying attitudes and beliefs and aligns them with external signals, little progress is possible (Amey, 2005; 2010; Edgar Schien 1985). While ATD had not encouraged colleges to integrate their efforts with external partners such as local K-12 systems, universities, and businesses during the time these colleges initiated institutional changes, these three LMAA winners did, and the efforts positively impacted student success. This was the most surprising result in this study. External adaptation is clearly evident as a practice integral to all three LMAA CEOs’ leadership. Evidence of sustained and substantial effort to adapt to external conditions and inputs is evident in all nine
interviews as well as supporting documents. While the preponderance of evidence within the
interviews is presented in Chapter Four, some highlights are presented here.

Leadership Coach 1 described an exceptional effort on the part of CEO 1 to increase
connections to local high schools in an attempt to change the large numbers of incoming students
testing into developmental education.

They established a partnership with the K through 12 institutions. English collaborated
with faculty members and the English department at the high school, the administrators at
CEO 1’s level and the cabinet level collaborated with the superintendents and their
leaders, and they developed some very strategic plans to help decrease the number of
students graduating from high school going into developmental ed.

I don't know of another community college in the country that has developed, and
maintained, I should say, the kind of relationships that College 1 has with the K through
12 folks. I suspect it's so strong that should CEO 1 retire in the next couple of years, it's
so systemic that it's going to stay after CEO 1 leaves because everybody owns it. They
want it to be a part of their community.

Core Team Leader 1 corroborated this take on effort to increase connections to external
stakeholders, describing in some detail the work to align the college with K-12 partners.

...one of his first days as the president. He made three phone calls to each of the districts
superintendents that College 1 works with. And I think that was a big change from how
College 1 operated with its high school partners in the past...CEO 1 believed, as I do, that
one of the best ways to increase success is to really have that connection between not
only the community college and our K-12 partners, but also the community college and
our four-year partners, especially when you’re looking at transfer and trying to make the
transition from high school to college as seamless as possible.

Externally, we've worked with...I think our first five years, a lot of our work was in the
external K through 12 space. We've developed a formal organization. That group has a
board of four individuals--myself, the three superintendents-- so the 12 high schools that
send in to our institution.

A similar level of coordination with external stakeholders was evident at College 2, with
Leadership Coach 2 describing work to better prepare students for college, transfer, and careers.
CEOs signaling to our internal community that this was an important priority, but also messaging that to the external community as well, has been another really valuable thing that CEO 2's done that I think has helped to improve student outcomes….We look at maximizing our capacity by maximizing connecting with others.

The pattern repeated in the three interviews with individuals associated with College 3.

Leadership Coach 3 stated,

CEO 3 was much more formally connected with the K-12 community. There's a university center there that has a number of universities that come in and offer upper division coursework. CEO 3 formalized the connections with them much more. Employers became much more impeccably involved with the chamber and with the economic development group, and I think probably became in many ways the principal mover and shaker in the community in terms of thinking about where economic development could occur and how the college could play an active role in it. I would view that as CEO 3’s most significant contribution to College 3 since CEO 3 came in, really tightening and formalizing those community relationships.

This was confirmed by Core Team Leader 3:

The CEO has to be the driver behind K-12 partnerships, so our president and our local school division's superintendents meet, converse regularly. Our university partnerships, our president sits on a council with our university partners, our local transfer institutions.

Effort on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to their communities could clearly be seen in CEO 3’s interview as well.

I have been very actively involved the greater community in that strategic planning work, and began to formally bring that into being as part of the student achievement work. I became very actively involved in the community as an active player in community economic development.

Theme Four is composed of the aggregate practices identified within the nine interviews conducted for this study. Listed below are the 20 practices the three CEOs in this study used in moving their colleges to LMAA status.

- Intentionally scaled collaboration with K-12 districts, universities, and employers to address student preparedness
• Set internal goals and benchmarks in context of external signals
• Led external fundraising efforts to address community needs of higher education
• Shared data with external constituents
• Developed external partnerships to last beyond the CEO’s tenure
• Clearly articulated signals form external community to internal constituents
• Focused on efforts to prepare students for college while they are still in high school
• Worked to develop scaled bridge programs and internships
• Created a local college promise program
• Initiated conversations with external partners
• Worked to provide better access by helping the college community better understand equity diversity and inclusion issues
• Created opportunities for high school students to take college courses in the high school and at the college
• Worked closely with political leaders to help them understand the nuances of the completion agenda
• Partnered with local social service providers to more fully meet student needs
• Engaged in a high profile manner in the national conversation about increasing student outcomes
• Encouraged large numbers of college employees to attend state and national conferences focused on increasing student success
• Used the college foundation as a means to increasing resources available to address student success issues
• Brought universities on site to help alleviate transfer issues for students
- Shared goals targets and benchmarks widely externally
- Aggressively pursued external grants in further student success work.
Figure 5.4: Theme Four: Effort on the Part of the CEO to Improve College Connections to Their Communities
Theme Five: Significant Realignment of Resources for ATD Efforts

The fifth theme to emerge as a practice of CEOs at the three LMAA-winning colleges examined in this study was significant realignment of resources for ATD efforts. As noted by Katz (1997), It is critical that other senior leaders reporting to the CEO share this vision of systemic change and of internal integration to achieve external adaptation, and then use their control of resources to signal their commitment to making the necessary changes. If CEOs do not provide this clarity, an uncertain signal is received by the rest of the college which can effectively short-circuit the processes of change. As Kezar (2016) noted, the capacity for institutional change needs to be reinforced by a realignment of resources that matches the significance of the desired change. This often means defunding parts of the system that are not aligned with the new goals, incentivizing the new subsystems with the realigned resources, and supporting the work with significant professional development opportunities (Trani & Holsworth, 2010). This fifth and final theme to emerge as a salient practice of CEOs at LMAA-winning colleges is, as with the themes above, evidenced in all nine interviews as well as supporting documents. While the preponderance of evidence within the interviews is presented in Chapter Four, some highlights are presented here.

A perspicuous message regarding the need to secure and make available significant funds to reify efforts to increase student success came through. Leadership Coach 1 stated,

To make this program work and raise the funds needed for it--if the foundation did not have some direction or some commitment to it and continued to raise money without a focus on the Promise Program, I don't know how effective it would've been, but there's a very clear focus message that this was something that we were going to do.
CEO 1 also described the process by which the college set aside funding for its efforts to create scaled interventions targeting points in the student experience that needed improvement.

We have an operational budget, annual budget about $125 million. When I first came here I suggested to the board that we take $3 million and put it in a strategic investment fund that could provide a source of funds for us to try out pilots intended to improve our student success outcomes over the course of the first five years, and we would finance that work out of the pilots. Pilots that we thought were making a difference we then moved to scale, and once we moved them to scale we funded them in the operational budget….This was very helpful to me both in this presidency and the last, to not ask people to try to dream without giving them some source of funds to try out their dream.

Leadership Coach 2 made the following statement regarding CEO 2’s efforts to fund its intervention work.

One of my favorite sayings is people find a way to pay for things that are important to them. When you put student success at the top of your agenda, then you show your commitment by using resources, available resources, both fiscal and human, in order to make those things work.

Leadership Coach 3 made the following statements about parallel efforts at College 3:

“I don't know that CEO 3 went to a zero-based budgeting approach, but something akin to that. Every division had to begin to justify its budget based on demonstrating what it would do for student outcomes.”

Theme Five is composed of the aggregate practices identified within the nine interviews conducted for this study. Listed below are the 16 practices the three CEOs in this study used in moving their colleges to LMAA status.

- Realigned existing resources at the scale needed to meet student success goals
- Tied efforts to secure external funding to efforts to increase student success
- Asked external constituents to apply resources to the effort as well
- Realigned faculty staff and administrative positions to align with student success goals
• Acted when current system capacity was inadequate to meet student success goals
• Increased college foundation efforts to raise resources for student success efforts
• Fully funded scaled student success interventions
• Assured funding for the development and trial of pilot programs
• Used a transparent budget development process that involves faculty and staff as well as administrators
• Articulated the long term benefits of realigning resources in terms of increased retention and completion
• Substantially increase institutional resources dedicated to institutional research and/or institutional effectiveness
• Shifted funds to professional development especially to support issues of equity diversity and inclusion
• Communicated to the board of trustees the importance of realigning resources to increase student success
• Realigned foundation to work toward an endowed college promise program
• Used strategies similar to zero-based budgeting to identify resources for reallocation
• Worked to overcome external budgetary limitations such as limited state or local funding or restrictive legislation.
Theme Five: Significant Realignment of Resources for ATD Efforts

worked to overcome external budgetary limitations such as limited state or local funding or restrictive legislation.

realigned existing resources at the scale needed to meet student success goals tied efforts to secure external funding to efforts to increase student success.

asked external constituents to apply resources to the effort as well.

realigned faculty staff and administrative positions to align with student success goals.

acted when current system capacity was inadequate to meet student success goals.

increased college foundation efforts to raise resources for student success efforts.

fully funded scaled student success interventions.

assured funding for the development and trial of pilot programs.

used strategies similar to zero-based budgeting to identify resources for reallocation.

communication to the board of trustees the importance of realigning resources to increase student success.

realigned foundation to work toward an endowed college promise program.

shifted funds to professional development especially to support issues of equity diversity and inclusion.

substantially increased institutional resources dedicated to institutional research and/or institutional effectiveness.

articulated the long term benefits of realigning resources in terms of increased retention and completion.

used a transparent budget development process that involves faculty and staff as well as administrators.

realigned faculty staff and administrative positions to align with student success goals.

increased college foundation efforts to raise resources for student success efforts.

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used a transparent budget development process that involves faculty and staff as well as administrators.

realigned faculty staff and administrative positions to align with student success goals.

increased college foundation efforts to raise resources for student success efforts.

fully funded scaled student success interventions.

assured funding for the development and trial of pilot programs.

Figure 5.5: Theme Five: Significant Realignment of Resources for ATD Efforts
Implications for Further Research

The study focused on answering the following research question: What leadership practices were evident in CEOs’ actions that helped move the colleges to become leader colleges and LMAA winners? As a case study looking at nine leaders at three colleges, the study design inherently presents a very small sample size within a very particular context.

The study solicited only the perceptions of the CEOs and the leadership coaches and core team leaders they worked with. Moreover, participant colleges were members of Achieving the Dream. Furthermore, the study is somewhat limited temporally, as all three LMAA winners included here won the award in a two-year period, which limits the scope of findings. Thus the following areas for further study are recommended: (1) A broader survey of other LMAA-winning community colleges might generate information about the practices used to improve student success; (2) Studies addressing longer-term gains may illuminate why some colleges are able to sustain student success, while others are not; (3) Future studies may include students to gain insight about effective practices that lead to improved student success; (4) New information might come from inclusion of a broader group who participated in the work such as priority and intervention team leaders as well as faculty and staff who only marginally participated in the institutional change initiatives.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, significant institutional change resulting in an increase in positive student outcomes is coupled closely with intentional practices executed by the college CEO. While there are differences in the individual stories of how each CEO led his or her respective college, there is overlap in the 92 relevant leadership practices that surfaced
during the course of the nine interviews at the three LMAA-winning colleges in this study. It is
clear that CEOs’ actions were seminal in helping move the colleges to become leader colleges
and LMAA winners with the ATD network. Confirmed through a process of triangulation with
three interviews and documents from three different colleges, the practices can be generally
organized into five broad themes. Those five themes are communicating the importance of
improving student outcomes to the college community, commitment on the part of the CEO to
increase the use of data to inform decision making, empowerment by the CEO of college
personnel to lead institutional change efforts, effort on the part of the CEO to improve college
connections to their communities, and significant realignment of resources for ATD efforts.

The first theme, communicating the importance of improving student outcomes to the
college community clearly, was evidenced by a number of overlapping key practices carried out
by all three CEOs of successful LMAA-winning colleges. All three CEOs signal through verbal
and written communication, along with making clear the linkage of key organizational resource
discussions, an institutional mandate to positively impact student outcomes. Evidence of this is
present in all nine interviews. The CEOs communicated to their workforces why the
organizational change is personally relevant and meaningful to individual employees, who
communicate these institutional change challenges to constituent groups. By effectively
communicating the importance of increasing student outcomes, the CEOs were able to move
their institutions from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium, setting the stage for the work of
internal integration and external adaptation, which resulted in significant quantifiable gains in
student outcomes at their respective institutions.
The second theme, commitment on the part of the CEO to increase the use of data to inform decision making, was evidenced by a number of overlapping key practices carried out by all three CEOs of successful LMAA-winning colleges and is an important component of ATD’s prescribed methodology for institutional change. By deeply engaging with their data, each institution was better able to understand the problems and challenges it faced related to improving student outcomes as a whole while closing achievement gaps. When the colleges began to work with ATD and saw their institutions through a different set of metrics, each college was able to broadly understand that the status quo was not acceptable. All three CEOs communicated effectively throughout their institution that data could be turned into meaningful information and utilized to make better decisions regarding student outcomes. By doing so, the CEOs prepared their colleges for change by moving from a state of equilibrium to a sense of disequilibrium by looking honestly at their data. The three LMAA-winning colleges in this study, due to practices executed by their CEOs, developed a deep capacity to collect, analyze, communicate, and act on their data.

The third theme, empowerment of college personnel to lead institutional change efforts, was also evident at all three colleges. A clear pattern of empowerment of individuals from throughout the institutional hierarchy at each college had been engaged in and helped lead the work. By empowering faculty, staff, and midlevel administrators to lead outside the college hierarchy, all three colleges were able to alter existing practice and policy, resulting in real change and improvement in student outcomes at all three colleges. Rogers (2003) stressed that it is important for all members of the system's knowledge to be utilized; specialized knowledge is crucial to the goal of achieving internal integration. This distributed leadership model helped shorten feedback loops and elicit buy-in broadly across all three colleges. This leads to good
decision making and a meaningful process of sensemaking and ownership of change at each college. The CEOs’ empowerment of individuals from across each college’s hierarchy to engage in the work of improving student outcomes is a clear salient practice, evidence for which exists in all nine interviews as well as reviewed documents.

The fourth theme, effort on the part of the CEO to improve college connections to their communities, was evident at all three colleges as well. The CEO at each college used signals from the community external to the college to set the stage and to provide the vision of what must change, why it must change, and what is required of the system for continued external integration. It is critical that other senior leaders reporting to the CEO share this vision of systemic change and of internal integration to achieve external adaptation, and then use their control of resources to signal their commitment to making the necessary changes. In some ways the level of effort and coordination that developed between the three colleges and their external communities was the most surprising result in this study. Adaptation through collaborating with K-12, universities, and business was clearly a factor in the significant gains all three colleges made in increasing student outcomes, and not a part of direction the colleges would have received from ATD.

The fifth theme was significant realignment of resources for ATD efforts. All three CEOs unmistakably shared vision of systemic change and of internal integration to achieve external adaptation, and used their control of resources to signal their commitment to making necessary changes. All three CEOs demonstrated a willingness to defund parts of the system not aligned with the new goals, thereby incentivizing the new subsystems with the realigned resources and supporting the new goals.
The examples above are of how practices carried out by CEOs at three of the highest functioning community colleges within the context of the completion agenda align with the advice given to colleges by ATD as well as what has been identified in the literature pertaining to institutional change and living systems theory. The study affirms that a substantial body of knowledge exists about what practices by CEOs create an environment conducive to institutional change leading to increased student success.

**Implications for Practice**

This study identified the leadership practices associated with colleges that have successfully improved student outcomes as defined within the ATD network. It also confirms much of what has been established in the literature regarding leading significant institutional change: that CEOs must communicate why the institutional change is personally relevant and meaningful to individual employees (Prochaska and Diclemente 1992); that CEOs need to create through their communication a sense of urgency to ready the system for change and create a sense of disequilibrium by sharing data widely and repeatedly (Broxson, 2016; Kotter, 1996); that CEOs can effectively communicate the importance of changing the system for better student outcomes, and move their colleges from a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium, setting the stage for the work of internal integration and external adaptation (Katz (1997; O’Banion 2012); that messaging from leadership is salient to any meaningful institutional change (Kezar, 2013; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005); that CEOs can use data to frame the need for change, allowing constituents of the college to see that the current situation within their institutions is not acceptable (Broxson, 2016; Gonzales, 2012: Achieving the Dream, 2016; Kezar, 2013); that CEOs, as Kotter (2006, 2008, 2014) concluded, must empower individuals from throughout the institutional hierarchy to engage in and lead institutional change work (Malm, 2008); that CEOs,
By empowering those who work at all levels of the college to lead change initiatives outside the traditional hierarchy, make real change and improvement possible (Kezar, 2013; O’Banion, 2012; Wheatley, 2001; Wolverton, Gmelch, Montez, & Nies, 2001; Youngblood, 1998). By doing these things, CEOs allow for all members of the system's knowledge to be utilized (Rogers, 2003). Such a distributed leadership model helps shorten feedback loops and elicits buy-in from all constituencies (Katz, 1997). Furthermore, by working more closely with elements external to their colleges, CEOs are able to help shape the very environment to which they must adapt, by increasing the preparedness of students entering their colleges and influencing the rules by which the college must abide (Amey, 2005; Bridgeforth, 2005; Burke, 2014; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kezar, 2013; 2010). Central to all of this is the willingness of CEOs to realign the limited resources that they have to support change efforts (Katz, 1997; Kezar, 2016 Trani & Holsworth, 2010).

Universities and institutes working to develop educational leaders can use the results of this study to enhance their curricula by including skill development modeled on the practices of successful LMAA-winning college CEOs. The environment in which presidents operate is changing rapidly, requiring new skills in addition to those that have long served them. Dwindling funds, new powerful technology, greater accountability pressure, and forces pushing to increase college completion rates coupled with changing demographics are all areas that encourage college CEOs to act differently. The changes in practice required to meet these trials, even when they are introduced to them through organizations such as ATD, are not often put in place. CEOs concentrating on fundraising and strategic planning may provide the illusion that they are addressing the need for change while making minimal real progress on the completion agenda. What is needed is a more expansive set of practices to bring about needed change.
College CEOs today are being asked to maintain and even increase access while increasing completion of underserved populations. This also means CEOs’ past attempts to educate a diverse student body have not been successful. This paper identifies practices CEOs have used to disrupt their colleges, stimulating significant change that helps more students to be successful and reflects strategies that help CEOs innovate. These strategies include creating campus-wide teams to support efforts, prioritizing and creating a unifying vision around diverse student success, adapting team strategy as they work with and learn from students and the community they are trying to serve, and using data to inform their understanding of the need to change as well as monitor progress toward goals.

If CEOs can get to know the campus culture and environment, commit for the long haul and then develop teams, allow for collective sensemaking, and empower those who understand the issues best, they may, as the CEOs in this study were, be more effective at managing the change being mandated from the external environment. Data and data management systems can be a way to help CEOs understand, communicate, and frame problems that result from a changing and unpredictable environment. They can also help move a college from a state of equilibrium by showing empirically that the status quo is unacceptable. Through the practices identified here, CEOs can help create an environment that encourages institutional learning by rewarding and encouraging risk-taking and making it safe to innovate and try new approaches.

Embracing their college’s collective creativity and empowering innovation allows CEOs to bring forward solutions to current problems. Systems thinking helps ensures that gutsy ideas reflect the many facets of complex systems in which colleges reside. The systems thinking of college CEOs must take into account not only the internal college environment but enlarge the idea to include a much broader set of players and structures. Success for first generation college
students must take into account related primary and secondary educational systems, community and social agencies, social policies, parents, and neighborhoods. CEOs need to be aware of and help to connect component parts of that ecology to help students.

There appears to be a significant gap between the leadership practices described in this paper and those currently being practiced by the CEOs of colleges struggling to make headway in their efforts to increase student success. Extrapolating from the results of this study, the largest differences seem to be in the willingness to push their colleges from the comfort of the status quo to the discomfort and uncertainty of disequilibrium; in the ability to adapt easily to changing circumstances within and outside the institution; in the ability to conceptualize a vision of the college's future and communicate that vision to others; and in the ability to take risks willingly. This study suggests the important work that needs to be done to bridge the gap between current presidential practices found at the highest performing colleges within the completion agenda and those needed at all colleges if they are to experience the levels of success found at the three LMAA winning colleges studied here.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A

Consent Form

Interviews for this research project will be conducted via Skype. The interviews will be recorded. Consent will be obtained at the beginning of the interview process before any information is gathered from the respondents.

Guide:
The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership practices used by CEOs at Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges within the ATD network. As the (CEO, ATD core team leader, or leadership coach) of one of the select group of Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges in the ATD network, I will be interviewing you regarding the leadership practices used at (insert college name) in the years leading up to the winning the Leah Meyer Austin Award. This study will seek the perspectives through interviews of the college CEO, core team leader, and ATD leadership coaches about leadership practices that contributed to an environment in which there was a measurable increase in student success. Audio/video recording is required for participation in this study. It is anticipated that interviews will last approximately 60 minutes. You should not participate if you do not wish to be recorded. An additional necessary source of data sought from your college will be any available documentation of these efforts. Specifically these documents include Achieving the Dream Annual Narrative Reports and Leah Meyer Austin Student Success Leadership Award Applications. Following data analysis, to ensure internal validity respondent validation will be employed. Participants will be asked to review the emergent validity respondent validation will be employed. Participants will be asked to review the emergent themes and asked if the themes adequately capture their thinking. Convenience sampling will again be used to select which participants review the emergent themes. Those participants who indicate they are both willing and available to review the themes will be provided the opportunity to do so. Participants will also be invited to include any additional thoughts they may have at that time. Participants will be given 30 calendar days to do so after being provided with the data. If participants do not provide their responses within 30 calendar days, their review will not be included in the final study. Additional contributions will become part of the data set. Results of the study will be reported in narrative form. The thesis will be submitted to the OSU Scholar’s Archive. Due to the small and well-defined population, subjects may be identifiable, but responses will be kept confidential. Direct quotes may be used in the findings. There is a chance that we could accidentally disclose information that identifies you. Pseudonyms will be used when reporting the findings to maintain subject confidentiality.

There are no direct benefits to subjects associated with their participation. You will not receive payment for your participation. Your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty for choosing not to participate or for leaving the study at any time; you are free to skip any questions or activities. Your decision to not participate will not impact your employment or your benefits through your employer. The security and confidentiality of information collected from you online cannot be guaranteed. Confidentiality will be kept to the extent permitted by the technology being used. Information collected online can be intercepted, corrupted, lost, or destroyed; it may arrive late or incomplete, or contain viruses.
If you have any concerns at any point you may at any point contact the principle investigator, Dr. Joe Johnson, by emailing joe.johnson@oregonstate.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about this, please contact the Human Research
Appendix B

Example Email
to be sent to CEOs of Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges:

Greetings. I am writing a dissertation in fulfillment of requirements for a doctorate of education with an emphasis in community college leadership at Oregon State University. My dissertation research project is titled AN EXAMINATION OF LEADERSHIP AT LEAH MEYER AUSTIN AWARD-WINNING COLLEGES WITHIN THE ACHIEVING THE DREAM NATIONAL REFORM NETWORK. The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership practices used by CEOs at Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges within the ATD network. As the leader of one of the select group of Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges in the ATD network, I am seeking your support and participation in this study.

The research will be a multiple case study that examines leadership practices used to increase student success through sustained innovations at three ATD Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges. The study will seek the perspectives through interviews of the college CEO, core team leader, and ATD leadership coaches about leadership practices that contributed to an environment in which there was a measurable increase in student success. All interviews will be conducted via Skype. An additional necessary source of data sought from your college will be any available documentation of these efforts. While we know much about the overarching strategies within ATD and the process of institutional change has a rich tradition in the academic literature, no study to date has attempted to identify what leadership practices are common to colleges crossing the significant threshold of change that brings them to be Leah Meyer Austin Award-winning colleges. This research project is being led by the principle investigator and my major professor, Dr. Joe Johnson, Oregon State University faculty.

I thank you in advance for your support of this project,

Thomas Broxson
broxsont@oregonstate.edu

PI: Joe Johnson
Joe.johnson@oregonstate.edu
Appendix C

Interview Questions

CEO interview questions:

1. How long have you been the college CEO?
2. As the college CEO, please describe your leadership.
3. As the college CEO, do you feel that your leadership style has changed during your time at this institution? If so, how?
4. As CEO, how do you think your constituents/stakeholders would describe your leadership?
5. As CEO, how do you define institutional improvement as related to your institution?
6. Your institution has earned leader college status by ATD and won the Leah Meyer Austin Award. As you know, ATD’s key performance indicators include term-to-term and first-to-second year retention rates; precollege, gateway and college-level completion rates; and three-year graduation rates. ATD colleges also track gaps in equity between various age, socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and other demographic groups. Beyond these data about outcomes, are there other areas, in your opinion, that helped move your college to leader- and Leah Meyer Austin-winning status?
7. As the CEO, in what specific ways have you communicated your institution’s commitment and collaboration of the institution’s leadership with respect to student success and the clarity of the vision for desired change?
8. As the CEO, in what specific ways have you supported your institution’s capacity to collect, access, analyze, and use data to inform decisions and to use powerful technology to support student success?
9. As the CEO, in what specific ways have you supported your institution’s commitment, capabilities, and experiences to equitably serve low-income students, students of color, and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate?

10. As the CEO, in what specific ways have you supported your institution’s capacity to create strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, such as K-12, universities, employers, community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes?

11. As the CEO, in what specific ways have you supported the alignment of the institution with the umbrella goal of student success and the institution’s process for translating the desired future into defined goals and objectives and executing the actions to achieve them?

12. As the CEO, in what specific ways have you supported the institutional policies and practices that impact student success and the processes for examining and aligning policies and practices to remove barriers and foster student completion?

13. As the CEO, in what specific ways do your leadership play a role in the institutional improvement of your institution?

14. As the CEO, how do you establish future performance targets related to the existing performance of your institution?

15. As CEO, to what degree do your stakeholders understand the designation of leader college and winning the Leah Meyer Austin Award? How did you/do you communicate these designations to your stakeholders?
16. As college CEO, what do you think is the single most important goal for your institution to accomplish regarding its future performance to increase student success?

Why do you think this goal is most important?

Leadership coach interview questions:

1. How long have you been the college leadership coach?

2. As the leadership coach, please describe the leadership of the CEO.

3. As the leadership coach, how do you think the college CEO leadership have changed during his or her time at the institution?

4. As the leadership coach, how do you think college constituents/stakeholders would describe the leadership of the campus CEO?

5. As leadership coach, how do you think the campus CEO defines institutional improvement as related to your institution?

6. This institution has earned leader college status by ATD and won the Leah Meyer Austin Award. As you know, ATD’s key performance indicators include term-to-term and first-to-second year retention rates; precollege, gateway and college-level completion rates; and three-year graduation rates. ATD colleges also track gaps in equity between various age, socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and other demographic groups. Beyond these data about outcomes, are there other areas, in your opinion, that helped move your college to leader and Leah Meyer Austin-winning status?

7. As the leadership coach, how do you think the CEO has in specific ways communicated this institution’s commitment and collaboration of the institution’s leadership with respect to student success and the clarity of the vision for desired change?
8. As the leadership coach, how do you think the CEO has in specific ways supported this institution’s capacity to collect, access, analyze, and use data to inform decisions, and to use powerful technology to support student success?

9. As the leadership coach, in what specific ways do you think the CEO supported the institution’s commitment, capabilities, and experiences to equitably serve low income students, students of color, and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate?

10. As the leadership coach, in what specific ways do you think the CEO has supported this institution’s capacity to create strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, such as K-12, universities, employers; community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes?

11. As the leadership coach, in what specific ways do you think the CEO has supported the alignment of the institution with the umbrella goal of student success and the institution’s process for translating the desired future into defined goals and objectives and executing the actions to achieve them?

12. As the leadership coach, in what specific ways do you think the CEO has supported institutional policies and practices that impact student success and the processes for examining and aligning policies and practices to remove barriers and foster student completion?

13. As the leadership coach, in what specific ways do you think the CEO’s leadership play a role in the institutional improvement at this institution?
14. As the leadership coach, how do you think this college president establishes future performance targets related to the existing performance at this institution?

15. As leadership coach, to what degree do you think the stakeholders understand the designations “leader college” and “winning the Leah Meyer Austin Award”? How does the college CEO communicate the designations to your stakeholders?

16. As leadership coach, what do you think is the single most important goal for this institution to accomplish regarding its future performance to increase student success? Why do you think this goal is most important?

**Core team leader interview questions:**

1. How long have you been the college core team leader?

2. As the core team leader, please describe the leadership of the CEO.

3. As the core team leader, how do you think the college CEO leadership have changed during his or her time at the institution?

4. As core team leader, how do you think college constituents/stakeholders would describe the leadership of the campus CEO?

5. As core, team leader, how do you think the campus CEO defines institutional improvement as related to your institution?

6. Your institution has earned leader college status by ATD and won the Leah Meyer Austin Award. As you know, ATD’s key performance indicators include term-to-term and first-to-second year retention rates; precollege, gateway and college-level completion rates; and three-year graduation rates. ATD colleges also track gaps in equity between various age, socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and other demographic
groups. Beyond these data about outcomes, are there other areas, in your opinion, that helped move your college to leader- and Leah Meyer Austin-winning status?

7. As the core team leader, how do you think the CEO has in specific ways communicated your institution’s commitment and collaboration of the institution’s leadership with respect to student success and the clarity of the vision for desired change?

8. As the core team leader, how do you think the CEO has in specific ways supported your institution’s capacity to collect, access, analyze, and use data to inform decisions, and to use powerful technology to support student success?

9. As the core team leader, in what specific ways do you think the CEO has supported the institution’s commitment, capabilities, and experiences to equitably serve low income students, students of color, and other at-risk student populations with respect to access, success, and campus climate?

10. As the core team leader, in what specific ways do you think the CEO has supported your institution’s capacity to create strategic partnerships with key external stakeholders, such as K-12, universities, employers; community-based organizations, and internal stakeholders across the institution to participate in the student success agenda and improvement of student outcomes?

11. As the core team leader, in what specific ways do you think the CEO has supported the alignment of the institution with the umbrella goal of student success and the institution’s process for translating the desired future into defined goals and objectives and executing the actions to achieve them?
12. As the core team leader, in what specific ways do you think the CEO has supported institutional policies and practices that impact student success and the processes for examining and aligning policies and practices to remove barriers and foster student completion?

13. As the core team leader, in what specific ways do you think the CEO’s leadership play a role in the institutional improvement of your institution?

14. As the core team leader, how do you think your college president establishes future performance targets related to the existing performance of your institution?

15. As core team leader, to what degree do you think your stakeholders understand the designations “leader college” and “winning the Leah Meyer Austin Award”? How does your college CEO communicate the designations to your stakeholders?

16. As core team leader, what do you think is the single most important goal for your institution to accomplish regarding its future performance to increase student success? Why do you think this goal is most important?