12-2019

Building Evaluation Capacity in Community Colleges

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BUILDING EVALUATION CULTURE AND PRACTICE

IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

By

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Organization, Information & Learning Sciences

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December, 2019

Acknowledgements

To Jace, our Keystone Species.

Dr. Xeturah Woodley, thank you for being in my circle at all the right times.

Dr. Patsy Boverie, thank you for giving me courage.

Dr. Robert Grassberger, thank you for supporting me for so many years, you always show up.

Thank you dear John Pathakis, for making all the great things happen.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to provide insight into strategies that promote a practice of evaluation in community colleges. This study focuses on the aspects of organizational culture including employee engagement, leadership participation, evaluation practices, values and expectations, organizational norms, and benefit and incentive system associated with evaluation practice. Evaluation includes those activities conducted to identify the performance of processes and initiatives as well as the use of the information to improve the process or understanding of the process

The growing focus on accountability in higher education has included speculation about the most important measures of institutional success. Despite the need for and importance of establishing a practice of evaluating the impact of community college efforts, community colleges lack consistent and effective evaluation practices.

This qualitative study targeted key personnel from thirty-four (34) public community colleges across the United States recognized by the Aspen Institute in the Community College Excellence Program. Surveys were sent to the person responsible for accreditation at

the institution and a telephone interview was optional subsequent to the completion of a questionnaire in order to learn more about question responses.

Participants described that evaluation and closing the loop was more likely to take place if there were processes in place that made evaluation practice straight- forward, easy to do, clearly defined, and nestled within an infrastructure to support evaluation practice. An effective infrastructure needed to include expectation clarification, leaders talking about evaluation, support for employees, processes and structures in place, and recognition that is valued.

Results of this study are intended to assist leaders in selecting strategies that most effectively promote a culture of evaluation that encourages the practice of measuring and identifying most effective practices. The present study will provide guidance and insight to community college leaders who are in the earliest stages of designing and implementing an organizational practice of evaluation.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter I – Introduction

Introduction

The researcher will study the issues surrounding the perceived lack of evaluation in organizations of higher education and attempt to provide insight into what it takes to develop a culture of evaluation. Evaluation for this study refers to activities, actions, and protocols that lead to measuring the performance of organizational processes or initiatives. Evaluation in this context is not referring to employee performance evaluation. This study will address evaluation from a general perspective and provide focus through the application of a qualitative research method on evaluation strategies in public sector community colleges.

American community colleges – Background. Community colleges date back to the beginning of the twentieth century in response to the need for workers trained in industrial technologies developing at the time (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Historically and still today, community colleges serve communities by providing responsive programming, embrace their historic mission of open access, and focus on how to make students successful (Boggs, 2011). They have promoted the economic growth of communities and "have been at the center of the promotion of universal higher education." (Vaughan, 2000, p. 4). As Cohen (2001) describes, "Community colleges distinguish themselves from four-year institutions by their multiple functions and missions, which have been inherent from their early beginnings. Historically, these functions have been part of the foundation of what can be considered American education's most democratic institution" (p. 58). Others argued that without community colleges, America would not have a middle class (Mellow & Heelan, 2014).

Notwithstanding this prominent purpose associated with making higher education accessible, community colleges were like other educational institutions also looked upon to solve social and economic problems (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The social benefits of an educated population include decreased dependence on public support, decreased incidence of, decreased crime rates, improved health, increased involvement in community, and improved awareness and appreciation of diversity (Mellow & Heelan, 2014, Tinto, 2012). Finally, with his focus on raising educational attainment in the country, President Barack Obama brought attention and spotlight to community colleges (Boggs, 2011).

The American community college is a unique institution and although access and enrollment have grown dramatically in 50 years, completion hasn't kept the same pace (Jenkins, 2011, Mellow & Heelan, 2014)

Community college facts. There are currently 1,051 community colleges in the United States (U.S.) including public, tribal, and independent colleges and these institutions serve 41% of all undergraduate students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019a). As an important segment of the U.S. higher education system, community colleges educate a large number of minority students; 56% of Native American undergraduates attend community colleges, 52% of Hispanic undergraduate students attend community colleges, 42% of Black undergraduate students attend community colleges, and 39% of Asian/Pacific Islander undergraduate students attend community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019a). Among the students who began college in the Fall of 2016, 62% were still enrolled at an institution in the Fall of 2017 (Community College Research Center, 2019). Among low income college students, 44% of students attend a community college as their first college after high school (Community College Research Center, 2019).

Consistent with the historic place for community colleges in solving problems in the country, President Barack Obama's focus on community colleges grew from a report at the time from the Council of Economic Advisors, indicating that the U.S. would need a more skilled workforce to remain globally economically competitive (Brandon, 2009). Throughout his presidency, President Obama would go on to introduce initiatives that promoted educational attainment such as The American Graduation Initiative, the American College Promise, and the College Scorecard. Because the mission of community colleges is to promote and facilitate broad accessibility, community colleges have the ability to dramatically impact postsecondary attainment (Jenkins, 2011).

In his July 2009 speech at Macomb Community College in Warren, Michigan, President Obama introduced his American Graduation Initiative intended to increase the number of college graduates over the next ten years to five million (Brandon, 2009). Although unfunded by Congress, President Obama proposed $12 billion to support community colleges over the next decade and that would require institutions who sought funds to evaluate and demonstrate the impact of initiatives (Brandon, 2009). Part of President Obama's budget in 2010 was $2.5 billion set aside for state and federal partnerships that placed as a goal, to identify through rigorous evaluation, practices that would increase retention and graduation (Sloane, 2016). Other proposals aimed at expanding the role and impact of community colleges emerged in the last half of Obama's second term.

In January 2015 President Obama introduced his American College Promise proposal with the desire that two years of community college education would be free (White House, 2015). Additionally, in late 2015, President Obama introduced the concept of a College Scorecard which would provide the public information about the graduation rate, earnings after graduation, and student loan payback progress. A report from Inside Higher Ed suggested that with this Scorecard "the new data are likely to add fuel to the growing debate in Washington over ways to hold the nation's colleges - which collectively receive roughly $150 billion in federal aid each year - more accountable for student outcomes" (Fain, 2015).

Along with President Obama's agenda, many organizations and initiatives emerged to promote educational attainment but also, higher education accountability. For example, the National Commission on Higher Education Attainment, established in 2011, represented a coalition focused on improving award attainment. One recommendation the commission made was the "Quality Agenda" established to look at quality in higher education (American Council on Education, 2013). The Quality Agenda encompassed more than a dozen initiatives aimed at maintaining academic quality (American Council on Education, 2012). With the pressures of the Completion Agenda, initiatives were established to ensure that academic standards would not be lowered in order to graduate more students. Ewell (2012) indicated that the Quality Agenda initiatives included accountability framework initiatives, ensuring accreditation standards, and teacher education accountability. Additional efforts and initiatives aimed at accountability to taxpayers, policy makers, families, and students took root during this period. These include the National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education developed by the State Higher Education Executive Officers, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and the National Report Card on Higher Education.

Higher education performance - Retention and graduation. The success of higher education has had a long history in the U.S. based on the American value system that embraces individuality, self-improvement, and equality of opportunity (Yankelovich, 2009). And now, the American community college concept has been viewed as a valuable model to replicate internationally in other countries such as Japan, China, and South America, as they seek to learn more about how community colleges represent the link between high school and the university as well as technical education (Boggs, 2012). Boggs (2012) also suggests, "the need to open the doors of higher or further education beyond the relatively limited enrollments in selective universities has spawned an international movement to develop or expand institutions that are generally less expensive, more accessible, more flexible, and tied more closely to business and industry" (p. 39).

However, despite higher education successes, the Commission on the Future of Community Colleges reported that the U.S., while previously a leader, was 16th in the world in award completion for students between 25-34 years old (Bradley, 2012). Although completion rates are low for public community colleges, there is acknowledgement that measures of success in completion rates focus on first-time, full-time degree-seeking students, a very small percentage of students attending community colleges as most students attend part-time (Juszkiewicz, 2016). Complete College America, an organization focused on assisting states to increase the number of Americans with certificates and degrees, suggested that "between 1970 and 2009, undergraduate enrollment in the U.S. more than doubled, while the completion rate has been virtually unchanged" (Complete College America, 2017).

In fall of 2009, 59% of students who began seeking a bachelor’s degree completed the degree within six years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). For community colleges, despite awarding more than 795,000 associate degrees and more than 494,000 certificates during 2013-2014 (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019a), community colleges strived to do more. Jenkins (2011) studied high performing community colleges and stated that "community college efforts to increase completion rates typically involve small programs or pilots that serve relatively few students and often rely on temporary outside funding. Increasingly, reformers are seeking more fundamental, systematic changes in how the community colleges operate" (p. 2).

Additionally, the National Student Clearinghouse's most current six-year completion rate for all community college students was 39 percent (Fain, 2015). Fall-to-fall retention for first-time full-time degree-seeking students who enrolled in fall of 2012 is 80 percent in 4-year institutions, and 59 percent in public community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Only 29 percent of first-time full-time degree-seeking students who began in fall 2010 at public 2-year institutions completed their certificate or degree within 150 percent of time. This rate is higher for the private for-profit institutions at 63 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

In his article discussing how higher education has been an essential mechanism to reinforce and support the social contract, Yankelovich (2009) indicates that several trends have impacted the impression and place of higher education in the U.S. These trends focus on politics, economics, demographics, and culture, and indicate that, among other things, qualified students are being denied access to higher education because of cost. Although community colleges were developed for open access and low cost, Jenkins (2011) contends in current times it is essential for community colleges to focus on student completion of an education that provides a living wage for individuals and families, and support a national economy in need of a more skilled workforce.

Accountability in higher education. Mellow and Heelen (2014) argue that accountability in higher education became a pronounced focus in the 1990s and 2000s in much the same way that accountability surfaced in the K-12 sector in the 1980s.

Accountability in higher education began with a political and fiscal focus (Ewell, 1994) becoming high profile in the 1980s and then again in the decade of the 1990s as the question of the return on investment of public funding became emphasized (Dougherty & Hong, 2005). Within this paper, accountability refers to institutional and/or program effectiveness in achieving expected performance outcomes (Cohen, 2001).

Community colleges, as publicly funded institutions, existing in the context of state and local resources and priorities, are accountable to taxpayers, business leaders, and policy makers (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). As such, graduation rates are one of the most often cited measures of performance, and policy makers focused on outcomes look to these metrics for the purpose of determining levels of state funded support (Hossler, 2006). Additionally, the U.S. regional accreditation standards and requirements seek evidence that institutions collect information about performance improvement. For example, the Higher Learning Commission, through the Academic Quality Improvement Program pathway requires that accredited institutions answer "What are the results for continuous quality improvement to evidence a culture of quality?...All results should also include a brief explanation of how often the data is collected, who is involved in collecting the data and how the results are shared." (Academic Quality Improvement Program Pathway, Systems Portfolio, 2016, p. 22).

During the decade of the 1990s measures of accountability were introduced to help focus attention on low graduation rates. This triggered the beginning of the development and implementation of performance accountability systems (Dougherty & Hong, 2005). Boggs (2011) indicates that "more and better data will be needed to document the effectiveness of college programs in responding to increasing calls for accountability and to advocate effectively for these programs" (p. 4). From the perspective of accountability, the cost of higher education has been an important focus alongside the focus on graduation rates.

Initiatives and efforts to improve accountability. In 1997, the National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education was formed to study factors associated with the costs of higher education. These factors included the increase in tuition then growing at a faster rate than other commodities and services, innovating and stabilizing costs, and trends in rising administrative costs. Recommendations from this body included improving cost containment, improving productivity and transparency about productivity, and making a shift in emphasis from compliance to performance (National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education, 1998).

In 2006, a commission appointed by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, presented recommendations focused largely on accountability and transparency in higher education. The report entitled "A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education" included recommendations focused on access, completion, financial aid, curriculum in science and technology, heightened accountability, and continuous improvement (Commission Report, 2006). This commission was established as a recognition for "urgent reform" (Commission Report, 2006, p. ix) and acknowledged that while the U.S. had, at one time, educated people at higher levels than any other nation, this was no longer the case. The report stated that, "Not everyone needs to go to college. But everyone needs a postsecondary education" (Commission Report, p. x).

Six recommendations were presented in the Spellings Report and recommendations three and four are most relevant for this study (Commission Report, 2006):

> Recommendation 3: To meet the challenges of the 21st century, higher education must change from a system primarily based on reputation to one based on performance. We urge the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education. Every one of our goals, from improving access and affordability to enhancing quality and innovation, will be more easily achieved if higher education institutions embrace and implement serious accountability measures.
>
> Recommendation 4: With too few exceptions, higher education has yet to address the fundamental issues of how academic programs and institutions must be transformed to serve the changing needs of a knowledge economy. We recommend that America's colleges and universities embrace a culture of continuous innovation and quality improvement by developing new pedagogies, curricula, and technologies to improve learning, particularly in the area of science and mathematical literacy (Commission Report, 2006, p. 17).

The Commission Report provided the following summary recommendation:

> We believe that improved accountability is vital to ensuring the success of all the other reforms we propose. Colleges and universities must become more transparent about cost, price, and student success outcomes, and must willingly share this information to improve communications with students and families. Student achievement, which is inextricably connected to institutional success, must be measured by institutions on a "value-added" basis that takes into account students' academic baseline when assessing their results (Commission Report, 2006, p. 8).

In a publication of the Education Policy Institute, Swail (2011) described that the Spellings Report was one of the most important documents in education history, and that little had been done to implement the recommendations. However, initiatives to measure higher education quality and performance continued even if they were not coordinated (Ewell, 2012). Ewell (2012) credits the Spellings Report in his description and status of the Quality Agenda. In this document he summarized a dozen initiatives put in place to help ensure the ongoing focus on academic quality in the face of pressure to graduate more students through the Completion Agenda.

In 2013, an article for the American Council on Education stated that President Obama's 2012 initiative to rate colleges was a continuation of many initiatives and a long-standing effort to "hold colleges accountable for cost, value, and quality" (American Council on Education, 2013). Additionally, the Voluntary Framework of Accountability, established in 2013 by the American Association of Community Colleges (2019b), represented another opportunity to show performance measures, but in this case measures that more appropriately represented the mission and work of community colleges.

In July 2015, Education Secretary Arne Duncan referred to the American education system as "broken and failing far too many of our students." Duncan's comments focused on the need for more than just looking at cost containment and containing growing levels of student debt, but also a focus on the quality of education, completion rates, and an overall return on investment (Stratford, 2015).

Measuring community college performance. However, as Mellow and Heelen (2014) point out, despite the pressure and essential need to demonstrate effectiveness, community colleges struggle with 1) what to measure; 2) how to measure; and 3) when to measure. Authors Morest and Jenkins (2007) suggest that community colleges do not evaluate the impact of their programs routinely and when they do, they often do not use the results to make improvements in their approaches.

Similarly, Hossler (2006) in his research on how institutions are working to improve student persistence, found that institutions do not systematically study the impact of interventions. He writes "based on research to date, it is unlikely that anyone in these situations on most campuses will actually conduct a study to determine whether or not the investment actually improved persistence rates" (p. 12). Other research supports this perspective and indicates that often institutions do not conduct studies about the efficacy of interventions. Consequently, institutions lack the ability to effectively identify actions that will make the most impact on student success (Braxton, McKinney, & Reynolds 2006; Hossler, 2006; Morest & Jenkins, 2007). Finally, in his research of high-performing practices in community colleges, Jenkins (2011) notes that "it appears that many, if not most, do not follow key practices that are supported by research on organizational effectiveness. Observational evidence suggests that community colleges are often weak in following high-performance practices" (p. 13).

Demonstrating effectiveness. Researchers have developed performance indicators to represent higher education performance such as graduation rates, time to completion of degree, and employability of graduates. In his research on high performing community colleges, Jenkins (2011) indicates that ambitious goals are set for higher education attainment by policy makers and funders, and community colleges will need to increase the number of students they serve and improve the graduation rates over the next decade. Similarly, Tinto

(2012) calls for community colleges to "invest in long-term program development and ongoing assessment of program and institutional functioning" (p. 121).

Laanan (2001) suggests that, "like the rest of higher education, the most immediate challenges facing community colleges are diminishing fiscal resources, increasing student diversity, and the growing demands for responding to accountability mandates, both at the federal and statewide levels" (p. 57). Additionally, an essential element of the viability of a college is the accreditation by regional accreditors authorized by the U.S. Department of Education. Morest and Jenkins (2007) indicate that, "Accreditation agencies are also asking colleges to collect and analyze data by requiring evidence of student learning and achievement and the establishment of systems of institutional self-assessment to produce such evidence" (p. 4). Greater expectations from taxpayers, policy makers, and governmental entities are forcing community colleges to demonstrate their effectiveness, and this has triggered the creation of performance indicators, performance measures, performance-based accountability, and performance-funding (Laanan, 2001).

In her study of the challenges and opportunities for improving student success, Goldrick-Rab (2010) indicates that obstacles such as inadequate institutional research offices and poor routines associated with gathering and analyzing information interrupt the ability of the community college to use data to inform and drive decisions. Cohen (2001) suggests that community colleges will need to continue to develop strategies and approaches to demonstrate outcomes as resources decline, and data on outcomes will need to increase. He further suggests that with the shift to performance-based funding and heightened accountability, community colleges must engage in measurement activities that help them assess the impacts of strategies that represent investments in student success. Goldrick-Rab

(2010) indicate that "all efforts to enhance community college student success should be rigorously evaluated with frameworks that are capable of both estimating and explaining impacts. We need to know what works and why...we still know far too little about what works" (p. 458).

As indicated above, the particular focus on graduation rates has been a source of difficulty for community colleges. For example, Bailey, Jenkins, and Leinbach (2005) support an argument that graduation rates are not appropriate as a measure of college performance; issues they address include the socio-economic and academic problems of community college students, the realization that graduation rate measures are more appropriate for four-year colleges, and that students attending a community college may not be there to obtain a degree or certificate. These authors indicate further that 17% of community college students are attending for personal enrichment, 23% are attending for improved job skills, and 36% intend to transfer to a four-year institution; only 21% indicated an intent to obtain a degree or certificate (p. 8). Bailey et al. (2005) argue that "Graduation rates should be used cautiously as a measure of community college performance, since there is no question that many factors beyond the control of the colleges hinder their ability to increase the rates at which students complete. Community colleges are expected to open their doors to all students, regardless of academic or socioeconomic challenges and, compared with public four-year institutions, they are given fewer financial resources per student to provide their services" (p. 20).

However, according to Bailey et al. (2005), despite the challenges the community college population faces, community colleges can still do more to help students clarify their goals and gain insight on what it takes to achieve those goals. They suggest that "many students arrive at college without having grounded their goals in an understanding of the possibilities and the requirements of achieving them, further, as we have shown, goals can change and they are to some extent under the control of the college" (p. 23). Cohen (2001) argues that accountability in higher education, and specifically in community colleges is not going away and that institutions will experience more initiatives from the state and federal level geared to increase accountability and focus on results.

Interest in topic and statement of problem. In my role at Central New Mexico Community College (CNM), I see the impact and advantages associated with a systematic approach to evaluating performance. This interest focuses on performance of organizations, particularly in the form of performance of processes, initiatives, or implementations, such as new technology initiatives or strategies for supporting first time college students. Higher education institutions often lack evaluation capacity and although much research exists regarding the importance of and how to build evaluation capacity, little research exists regarding efforts and results associated with building this capacity (Clinton, 2014). As part of my current role at CNM, I am charged with implementing a newly developed systematic approach to performance improvement which includes setting regular performance reviews for key processes and initiatives. As a result, I am interested in studying the dynamics that promote building a culture committed to evaluation and those components needed to make evaluation successful in a post-secondary public sector educational environment. And, as indicated above, in his research on how institutions are working to improve student persistence, Hossler (2006) found that institutions do not systematically study the impact of interventions. Again, he writes "based on research to date, it is unlikely that anyone in these situations on most campuses will actually conduct a study to determine whether or not the investment actually improved persistence rates" (p. 12).

Purpose of the Study

Consistent with the problem described above, this study is designed to gain insight into the issue of evaluation in community colleges, and particularly how to increase evaluation culture. Culture is identified as an important factor in building evaluation capacity (Preskill & Boyle, 2008). This purpose includes revealing information about evaluation in the public sector post-secondary community college environment in such a way that improves understanding of the issues and strategies that promote an evaluation culture. This study seeks to identify elements of culture that contribute to promoting evaluation practice. The literature in this study will focus on evaluation factors generally as well as evaluation in higher education, which in this case will refer to any activities associated with measuring the performance of processes or programs in order to make improvements in the program and to use the information to inform decisions. This study will address the following research questions:

1. *In high performing public community colleges, what **qualities and characteristics** of the organization promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?*
2. *In high performing public community colleges, what **strategies** promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?*

Summary

Community colleges are an important element of the U.S. education system providing affordable access to higher education to more than 40 percent of all undergraduate students. In the face of decreased access to public funding, community colleges, like the rest of higher education, are pressed to demonstrate success and justify public funding provided for their work (Mellow & Heelen, 2014). As public resources become more scarce, policy makers look for evidence of effectiveness. In light of this reality, community colleges must develop capabilities and strategies that promote a culture and practice of measuring effectiveness in order to continue to improve institutional outcomes.

Chapter II – Literature Review

Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework for this research centers on the tenants of Organizational Learning Theory described by Argyris (1985), Expectancy Theory described by Vroom (1964), and Organizational Culture and Effectiveness Theory by Denison and Mishra (1989). These theories influence the directions of the literature review and the questions in the survey tool.

Organizational Learning Theory

Evaluation that leads to improvement reflects the concepts of Chris Argyris (2002) as he describes that organizations learn as they change to meet their goals. He said that "learning may be defined as the detection and correction of error" (Argyris, 2002, p. 206) and that "the best way to monitor and manage our environment is to help develop organizations that are good at learning and quick at turning around." (Argyris, 1993, p. 5).

This learning includes the distinction between single-loop learning and double-loop learning. He describes that single-loop learning involves fixing the problem superficially, whereas double-loop learning involves understanding the underlying cause of the problem, and working to repair from this deeper level. Single-loop learning is incremental in comparison to double-loop learning which seeks to address fundamental assumptions and understandings of the organization as well as its mission and purpose (Argyris, 1977). Argyris identified that organizations learn when they detect and correct errors (1993), and that an "error is any mismatch between what we intend an action to produce and what actually happens when we implement that action" (p. 3).

Levitt and March (1988), influenced by Argyris, also describe a third type of learning that involves learning about the learning system itself. Double-loop learning includes applying historical lessons and evaluating outcomes of efforts, and Bradley (2004) indicates that evaluation is the organizational learning system and the mechanism for learning about organizational performance.

An important element of Argyris' work focused on how defensiveness impacts organizational behavior and ultimately organizational results. Argyris (1995) described defensive routines as those that result in an organization that is not willing to confront performance problems and work to protect individuals and the organization. These routines prevent organizations from embracing mistakes and errors and making needed corrections. Argyris (2002) indicates that "organizational defensive routines are any action, policy or practice that prevents organizational participants from experiencing embarrassment or threat and, at the same time, prevents them from discovering the causes of the embarrassment or threat" (p. 213). He argued that, "defenses are more dangerous to the long-run health of the organization because first they distort the truth in the name of helping others" (Argyris, 1985, p. 7). Finally, Argyris said that, "the reason these defensive routines are not seen as counterproductive is that they are connected with caring, thoughtfulness, and effectiveness" (1985, p. 8). He suggests that these are behaviors learned early in life and reinforced in organizations (1985). The work of Argyris is important for this research in that understanding successful strategies that promote routines and practices of evaluation, help to decrease defensiveness, and improve organizational effectiveness.

Expectancy Theory

Victor Vroom introduced expectancy theory in 1964 to provide insight, and to integrate existing concepts into the field of vocational motivation (Lee, 2007). His theory of motivation focused on the notion that employee effort will lead to performance and performance will lead to rewards (Vroom, 1964). Vroom's theory made an important impact on the thinking of workplace motivation and continues to influence thinking about what motivates employee actions and performance (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996). Latham and Pinder (2005) describe that motivation is "the psychological process resulting from the interaction between the individual and the environment" (p. 486). Vroom's theory suggested that people are motivated when they expect their effort will result in creating a specific outcome that is important to them. His theory centered on the factors of expectancy, instrumentality, and valance. He identified that expectancy was about effort and the awareness that increased effort will result in increased performance. Instrumentality refers to the belief that if performance is high, something valuable will likely come from it. And finally, valence refers to the concept of personal value, recognizing that motivation to action is influenced by what is valued. Vroom pointed out that value may be relative; leaders may not value what other employees value or that all employees may not value the same things in the same way (Vroom, 1964).

From an organizational leader perspective, Expectancy Theory helps leaders understand how they might create and promote opportunities for employees to succeed. Leaders can then reward employee successes, which helps illustrate for others in the work environment the connection between action, results, and rewards. This theory is also helpful to clarify how organizations might motivate customers to use their products (Lee, 2007).

From the perspective of this study, Vroom's theory illustrates the importance of thoughtful reflection on what motivates employee performance and the necessity of anticipating the impact of perceptions. This study seeks to understand factors that promote employee engagement and success in efforts related to evaluating organizational performance.

Organizational Culture and Effectiveness Theory

Denison and Mishra (1989) studied organizational culture as it related to and impacted organizational effectiveness. They began by describing four elements that impact effectiveness; these elements included involvement, consistency, adaptability, and importance placed on mission. Their concept of involvement focused on the notion that "high levels of involvement and participation create a sense of ownership and responsibility" (Denison & Mishra, 1989, p. 168). Consistency referred to the positive impact that a strong culture with shared values and beliefs has on the ability of an organization to effectively reach consensus and implement coordinated activities. They described that having this underlying framework in place was more effective than imposing requirements on organizations (Denison & Mishra, 1989). Denison and Mishra describe adaptability as a set of elements in place that help an organization adjust to change. For example, the ability of an organization to respond successfully to the external environment, the organization must be able to connect change to their values. Additionally, they believed organizations should be less insular because the behaviors and actions required for departments and divisions to interact prepares them to give and take in the face of change. The ability to adapt effectively requires the organization to think about change as a process and they need to have processes in place that facilitate change (Denison & Mishra, 1989).

Research supports the notion that the four cultural traits identified by Denison and Mishra make an impact on measures of organizational effectiveness and that "the cultures of organizations have an important influence on effectiveness" (Denison & Mishra, 1995, p. 220). Similarly, Detert, Schroeder, and Mauriel, (2000) suggest "A company's prevailing cultural characteristics can inhibit or defeat a reengineering effort before it begins" (p. 850).

The work of Denison and Mishra is important for this research as it influences thinking about the impact of the environment on organizational learning and change. The survey sent to participants in this study posed questions about leadership actions and employee engagement, and as intended, will provide insight into the culture of effective organizations. The theories described above influence the elements of this literature review that begins with the origins of community colleges within the American educational system.

American Community Colleges – The Beginning

Education has always been valued in American society and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 established public education. This was an act of the Confederation Congress addressing among other things, natural rights, slavery, and established public education for the territory (Northwest Ordinance, https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/northwest.html).

As early as the 1830s, there came to be a demand for free public school, and elementary education schools, called "common schools", were created in small and large communities and towns (Palinchak, 1973, p. 8). Eventually, there began to be an awareness of the connection between economic opportunity and education (Brint & Karable, 1989).

Beyond elementary education, social forces triggered the concept of the community college including the need to train workers for industries expanding in the nation, and the desire for equality in access of education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Vaughan, 2000). "The community college is not a junior college, it is more. Designed to provide educational services to all people, not just the academically fit, this institution operates in the public interest with an equal access philosophy" (Palinchak, 1973). The first community college in the U.S. was Jolliet Junior College, founded in 1901 in Jolliet Indiana, as an experimental post-graduate high school program (Joliet Junior College, 2018). Founders of Jolliet wanted students to be able to stay in their community to obtain their first two years of a college education (Joliet Junior College, 2018).

While the American community college developed from the need to educate people in the time of expanding industries, it also served to provide opportunity for teenagers who were for the first time, going to school longer than before (O'Banion 1989). In the early 1900s more teenagers were in school than ever before and more than in other countries such as Great Britain, France, Germany, and Sweden (Brint & Karable, 1989). American youth entered and stayed in school for a number of reasons including the push for literacy and ability to read the Bible, the recognition that skills for life were needed, schools were free and accessible, and there was a great expansion in school buildings (Goldin & Katz, 1999).

By the 1920s, the beginnings of the American education system in place today were already visible; these beginnings were providing alternative pathways for success and supporting the American ideal of equality of opportunity (Brint & Karable, 1989). Additionally, as described above, awareness was growing in the early twentieth century of the value of an educated society, and the positive impact that education would have on a community helped to promote the growth of community colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Finally, Cohen and Brawer (2003) suggest that the most important growth in community colleges came because of growing demands on schools at all levels. Community colleges were another place where the problems of society could be addressed, "whatever the social or personal problem, schools were supposed to solve it" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 2).

Community colleges were originally neighborhood schools and state plans included elements of community college development (Cohen, 2001). The federal government had little to do with community colleges until the Great Depression when workforce development was an important national focus (Cohen, 2001; Mellow & Heelan, 2014). George Vaughan (2000) describes the following milestones in community college history;

- 1862 Morrill Act - also called the Land Grant Act, created greater access to higher education.
- 1917 Adoption of Junior College Accreditation Standards - established standards for the accreditation of public and private junior colleges.
- 1944 GI Bill of Rights - the Servicemen's Readjustment Act provided financial assistance to veterans of World War II; here the federal government provided resources to students on a large scale. This represented an early opportunity to provide access to higher education.
- 1947 Higher Education for American Democracy - this was published by President Truman's Commission on Higher Education and called for the creation of a large collection of community colleges that would charge little or no tuition, and provide education to support the community.
- 1963 Federal Aid to Higher Education - the federal government greatly expanded financial support to community colleges and students. This also increased access to higher education.

- 1970 Open Admission to City University of New York - this important move away from selective admissions provided access to higher education to all New York high school graduates. This triggered impactful policy changes including the expansion of developmental education, and the growth of community colleges in communities with significant economic need.
- 1978 Proposition 13 in California - because of limited access to property tax revenue, increased accountability would begin to impact K-12 schools and community colleges.
- 1988 Commission on the Future of Community Colleges Report - community colleges were challenged to be leaders in their communities to serve the region and promote a community culture.
- 1998 Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act Reauthorization - the federal government commits significant resources to fund vocational education.

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O'Banion (1989) said that "The community college as an institution is one of the most important innovations in the history of higher education" (p. 1) and added that "the driving premise of the community college - higher education for everyone - is a pivotal educational innovation not just for America, but for the world" (p. 1). He identified that Harvard University, the first institution of higher education in the U.S., was a transplant from Europe, including attendance restrictions related to class, race, and gender, and that the community college represented the opposite emphasis. Additionally, Palinchak (1973) said, "The community college is a direct manifestation of public will and it owes its allegiance to citizens and taxpayers. It attempts to fill an educational void not filled by other institutions, and in so doing, becomes a social agency with an open door to further the democratization of society" (p. 12). Finally, Mellow and Heelan (2014) describe that "community colleges express a distinctly American and democratic impulse...community colleges are by definition open admission, anyone with a high school diploma or equivalency is eligible" (p. 4).

Similarly, Cohen (2001) suggested the main contribution of the community college has been to provide access to students who would not have had another opportunity to participate in higher education. Community colleges have an "explicit and implicit commitment to accessibility and social justice. Not only do community colleges educate almost half of all undergraduates; they also disproportionately educate students from racial or ethnic minorities" (Mellow & Heelan, 2014, p. xv). Boggs (2011) described that "Community colleges owe their success to four enduring values: access, community responsiveness, creativity, and a focus on student learning" (p. 3).

Finally, community colleges are "highly regarded for their open admissions policy, which expands opportunities for everyone, regardless of prior advantages or disadvantages" (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 438). Not only can people get into a community college, they can also usually get to one - 90 percent of the population is able to commute to a community college (Boggs, 2011). Dassance (2011), reflecting on the historic mission of community colleges, suggested that "Providing access to higher education for underserved groups has been a monumental accomplishment for community colleges, but there will be increasing pressure for these colleges to demonstrate their success in regard to the educational progress for such students" (Dassance, 2011, p. 34).

Community College Effectiveness and Performance Improvement

The nation's community colleges exist in the 21st century with significant concerns in the forefront, including issues about their missions, how they function, and how effective they are in the eyes of the public (Laanan, 2001). The economic upheaval of the last fifteen years has triggered attention on community colleges as new students represent those who lost jobs and sought new skills to become gainfully employed (Boggs, 2011). Stymied by economic stagnation, in some areas, states have scrutinized and cut back financial support for higher education (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2017).

The growing focus on accountability in all of higher education has included speculation about the most important measures of institutional success; for example, questioning whether or not grades are a relevant measure of success and value when students can receive good grades but still remain unprepared for challenges of work (Mellow & Heelen, 2014). In his research on community college effectiveness, Tinto (2012) suggests that despite years of working to develop effectiveness measures, community colleges still struggle to develop a coherent framework that represents which actions matter the most, and how they are best implemented. He argues that, "the result is an uncoordinated patchwork of actions whose sum impact on student retention is less than it could or should be" (p. 121). Finally, an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education cited that, "measuring success is one of community-college leaders trickiest subjects" (McMurtrie, 2008, p. 1270).

In their new book *Creating a Data-Informed Culture in Community Colleges*, authors Phillips and Horowitz (2017) suggest that community colleges are receiving national attention and that there are important national initiatives and opportunities to improve community colleges. Their text suggests that community colleges have an enormous amount of data, but lack good strategies that support end-users in effectively using information to drive success, institutionally or from a student-success perspective.

An example of responding to the gap in community colleges and one of the first significant efforts to improve graduation rates and student success; the 2004 *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* initiative. Designed to develop and implement strategies that significantly improved graduation rates, this initiative concentrated on the success of students of color, working adults, and students from low-income families. This initiative largely focused on helping community colleges develop capacity to collect and analyze data about student performance. An important element of this initiative was helping colleges build a culture of evidence (Rutschow-Zachary et al., 2011).

Researchers have proposed many performance improvement and reform models to improve community college performance. These include accreditation models, such as the Academic Quality Improvement Program, as a pathway for continued accreditation with the regional accrediting body, the Higher Learning Commission, and the use of the Baldrige National Quality approach. In his research of community college reform, Jenkins (2011) identified recommended practices for continuous improvement. These recommendations reflected practices in high-performing organizations and included evaluating the impact of initiatives and then making improvements as needed. Jenkins (2011) continued with the recommendation that "colleges should evaluate the effects of efforts to improve outcomes...just as important as evaluating changes in practice and policy is using the results to make further improvements" (Jenkins, 2011, p. 39).

Similarly, Tinto (2012) argued that higher education has a history of starting initiatives for the short-term, often supported with external funds, but not providing ongoing support, evaluating the impacts and successes, and ensuring sustainability. He further suggested that this stopping and starting costs the institution energy and enthusiasm of faculty and staff and leaves them less interested in future improvement initiatives. In his influential research, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action,* Tinto (2012) suggests that community colleges must engage in specific impactful actions to improve student success and institutional effectiveness, including the call to "invest in long-term program development and ongoing assessment of program and institutional functioning" (p. 121).

Finally, Senge (1990) argues that "superior performance depends on superior learning" (p. 7) and that leaders are responsible for building organizations in which people are continually expanding and growing to their more complete potential. Senge suggests that as an organization learns, it gains from the benefits of appropriate policies, structures, strategies, and continuously evaluating to understand the efficacy of these elements (Senge, 2006).

Value of Evaluation

As described above, in the context of this study, evaluation is referring to activities associated with checking into the outcomes and success associated with programs and initiatives. Evaluation is a profession with a particular language and vocabulary, standards, theories, regulations, and guiding principles (Ryan, 2002).

For purposes of this research, the definition of evaluation presented by Patton will be used; he indicates that

> program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and results of programs to make judgment about the program,

improve or further develop program effectiveness, and inform decisions about future programming, and/or increase understanding (Patton, 2008, p. 38).

Patton (2008) describes evaluation as a complex process that involves navigating organizational and individual dynamics, sometimes with an involved system of stakeholders.

Also, the description of evaluation by Preskill and Torres (1999b) is useful as they describe the impact of evaluation on organizational learning and change. They describe evaluation in this way, "We envision evaluative inquiry as an ongoing process for investigating and understanding critical organization issues. It is an approach to learning that is fully integrated with an organization's work practices, and as such, it engenders (a) organization members' interest and ability in exploring critical issues using evaluation logic, (b) organization members' involvement in evaluative processes, and (c) the personal and professional growth of individuals within the organization" (pp. 1-2).

Using measurement and evidence to inform decisions and performance is an important feature of high performing organizations (Kaynak, 2003). Additionally, measuring and using results to improve outcomes is also a requirement of heightened accountability. Tinto (2012) suggests that effective investing for public community colleges begins with assessing those aspects of institutional functioning that require improvement. He identified that this was the underlying reasoning behind the Lumina Foundation initiative Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count. This initiative moved member institutions to establish a systematic framework for collecting information about the outcomes of institutional initiatives intended to improve student success. Similarly, within a non-educational environment, in the early 1990s amidst the trend for increased accountability with public funds, the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act was passed into federal law and required agencies, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to create performance plans, measure and analyze performance, and report annually (Milstein, Chapel, Wetterhall, & Cotton, 2002).

Henry and Mark (2003) describe how evaluation makes an impact on three levels, including the individual, the interactions between individuals, and the organization as a whole. They argue that evaluation impacts the way people think and act, and their beliefs and opinions. They further stress evaluation influences the behaviors between individuals as they work to collaborate and persuade each other. Finally, they argue evaluation influences decisions and practices of organizations. Ivaldi, Scarati, and Nuti (2015) describes evaluation as "contributing to organizational transformation by mediating the inevitable political, cultural and relational implications that are characteristic of all evaluations" (p. 499).

Organizations, particularly public sector educational organizations benefit from evaluation activities. The Comprehensive School Reform model originating in K-12 education, emphasized evidence-based decision making as a fundamental principle (Education Week, Retrieved April 1, 2017 https://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/comprehensive-school-reform/). In a study focused on redesigning community colleges to improve completion, Jenkins (2011), as indicated above, found that colleges should evaluate the effectiveness of programs and strategies, use the results to further improve, and implement the results to help clarify the most effective use of resources.

Evaluation promotes 1) the opportunity for a discussion about the core value of what an organization does (Preskill & Torres, 1999b), and 2) organizational learning is a process of identifying problems and correcting them (Argyris, 1977). Additionally, evaluation can play a key role in changing and improving management methods (Rebolloso, Fernandez-Ramirez, & Canton, 2005). Further, evaluation promotes enlightenment as information moves from anecdotal to real with results of actual data collection (Henry & Mark, 2003). In 1999, the American Evaluation Association (AEA) called for the focus on evaluation capacity building and requested that the professional evaluation community focus on this issue. The AEA's directive intended to promote the recognition that evaluation was highly valuable for organizations and that the profession needed to help organizations build evaluation culture and skill (Bradley, 2004).

An important element of evaluation is its ability to help influence policy, and as it relates to this discussion, accountability systems. Evaluators are in a position as outsiders to help clarify the impact of accountability systems; the evaluation community "has the responsibility and obligation to go beyond position papers to play an integral part in the study of, improvement of, and judgments about the merit and worth of these assessment and accountability systems" (Ryan, 2002, p. 453). Ryan (2002) also indicated that "...evaluators are uniquely situated to make a significant contribution in the dialogue about the merits and shortcomings of educational accountability systems" (p. 454).

Saunders (2012) describes the many uses of evaluation information including instrumental, conceptual, enlightenment, process use, and for purposes of justification. He identifies that instrumental use helps initiatives or programs change as needed; conceptual use helps stakeholders understand the program or initiative better, while use for enlightenment adds knowledge to the field. He identifies that process use refers to all of the impacts associated with engaging in evaluation including the way people think about evaluation as a concept and the difference it makes organizationally. Finally, he describes that evaluation that takes place for justification purposes results in reinforcing or legitimizing a decision about a program or initiative through evaluation results. An example of direct instrumental use of evaluation information includes individual behavior change, such as teachers changing their approach to reading instruction after learning about the results of one approach over another (Henry & Mark, 2003). Evaluation can also raise awareness and increase the importance of something. Henry and Mark (2003) describe salience and indicate that salience refers to "the importance of an issue as judged by an individual" (p. 300) and that evaluation results can clarify how important issues are to individuals.

Goals of evaluation include improving individual, team, and organizational learning and improvement (Taut & Brauns, 2003). Ivaldi et al. (2015) described that developing an evaluation and making a decision to engage in a collaborative process, promotes the development of alliances between stakeholders and staff. Finally, Henry and Mark (2003) suggest that evaluation results are often the source of awareness of the minority opinion.

Description of Closing the Loop

The term “closing the loop” is used throughout this study. This term is commonly used in performance improvement language and refers to following-up to determine if intended outcomes were achieved (see Figure 2.1.).

Figure 2.1 illustrates the circular continuous nature of performance improvement and the portion in red highlights the role of evaluation which represents the actions of feedback of information about change that establishes and promotes a learning cycle. This circular process begins with assessing the need for improvement, and then planning and implementing an intervention intended to achieve an improvement. Evaluation is then systematically performed to ensure that the intervention results in the intended outcome.

Finally, integration occurs when the improvement becomes a normal part of business. The cycle can begin again whenever improvements are needed.

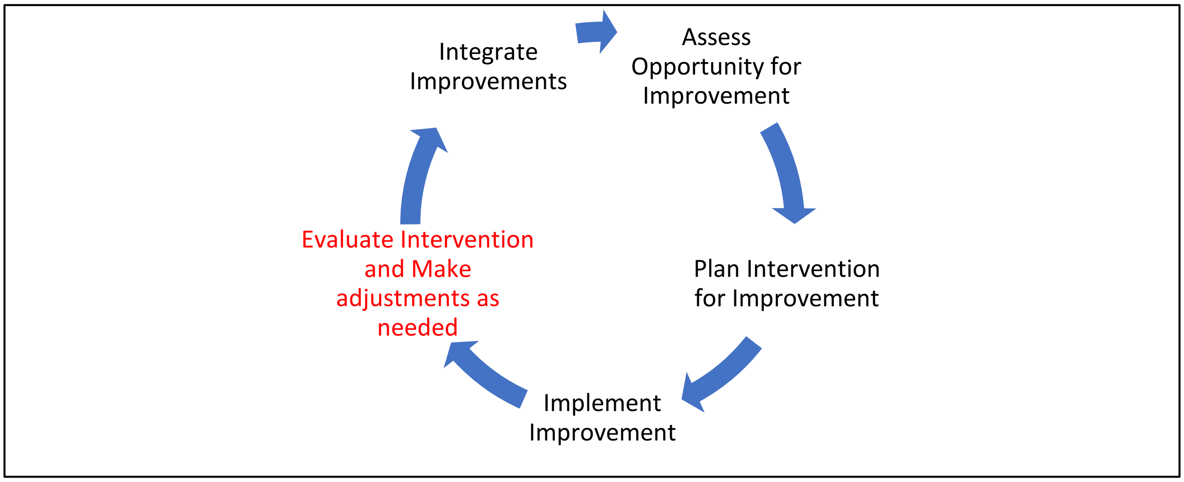

Figure 2.1. Closing the Loop Diagram: Central New Mexico Community College (2011)

As described earlier, Argyris identified that organizations learn when they detect and correct errors (1993), and that an "error is any mismatch between what we intend an action to produce and what actually happens when we implement that action" (p. 3). Argyris brings emphasis to the need to measure the impact of the initiative in order to know whether it produced the intended outcome; this is the essence of closing the loop.

Factors that Promote or Discourage Evaluation

The study of engagement in evaluation activities reveals that employees who participate in evaluation activities are more committed to program outcomes, which in turn, leads to greater sustainability of the program (Clinton, 2014). Rust-Eft and Preskill (2009) identify that reasons to conduct evaluation in organizations include improved quality, increased knowledge among members, improved resource allocation, and promotion of accountability. In the study of accountability systems, states required to comply with new accountability systems indicated the accountability reporting led the community college to become more aware of their performance (Dougherty & Hong, 2005).

Despite the obvious advantages, organizations do not always engage in activities that help reveal the success of organizational efforts. As described earlier, authors Morest and Jenkins (2007) suggest that community colleges do not evaluate the impact of their programs routinely and when they do, they often do not use the results to make improvements in their approaches. Phillips and Horowitz (2017) describe that community colleges engage in great efforts to initiate program, policies, and supports, but do not have adequate information about results.

Factors that contribute to the lack of evaluation are many, including the notion that checking on the results of initiatives takes significant effort. People tasked with evaluation may feel that their evaluation activities are burdensome to participants and take time away from program work (Whitehall, Hill, & Koehler, 2012). Participants in the Manitoba School Improvement Program initially identified evaluation as very time-consuming as well as burdensome. Ultimately however, participants at the School Improvement Program believed that carefully checking on the impact and outcomes of their work provided a focus for improvement, gave value to the organization through the realization of data use, and provided the opportunity for participants to review and reflect upon all that they had accomplished (Katz, Sutherland, & Earl, 2002).

More obvious reasons for resistance to evaluation include the fear that the results will make people look bad (Rebolloso et al., 2005). Bradley (2004) indicates that although the focus of evaluation is on organizational learning, evaluation is a judgment that may be difficult for organizations and individuals to hear, and may involve issues related to politics and power. Speaking specifically about how educators may react to feedback, in his work on educational evaluation, Stake (1995) writes "The educator's disdain of formal evaluation is due also to his sensitivity to criticism...it is not uncommon for him to draw before him such curtains as national norm comparisons, innovation phase, and academic freedom to avoid exposure through evaluation" (p. 1).

Senge (1990) described the role of leaders in organizations and reflected on the impact that leaders make on the culture of trust. Senge (1990) describing fundamentals of a learning organization, describes the important impact of leaders. He argues that, "People can suffer economically, emotionally, and spiritually under inept leadership. If anything, people in a learning organization are more vulnerable because of their commitment and sense of shared ownership" (p. 13). As an example, at the CDC a study group charged with improving accountability and evaluation determined that "honesty in evaluation is impossible to achieve within an environment of threat, resistance, and mistrust. It would help to reframe the fear of failure by promoting the notion that learning programs make up a learning organization" (Milstein et al., 2002, p. 35). Finally, in describing competencies of community college presidents, Mellow and Heelan (2014) describe the importance of capability to build trust among faculty and staff and suggest that "leaders must create an environment where people feel safe to speak from their hearts" (p. 143).

Edmondson (2012) describes the importance of leadership in setting the cultural stage that allows an open exchange about performance, including failure. She described the culture at Toyota Motor Company under Chief Executive Officer Fujio Cho who promotes continual focus not only on what worked, but also on what did not work. She identified that “They were able to consistently reframe failure so that it was seen as a learning opportunity, rather than as an embarrassing event. More generally, they understood the need to create productive policies and norms for dealing with failure that helped overcome the organizational tendency to punish failure" (p. 157). Senge (1990) also recognized the importance of this and recommended that leaders establish evaluation strategies that take the focus off of individuals and onto the systems that enable problems and errors to arise.

Similarly, Greene (2001) describes the relationship aspects of evaluation such as the focus on the way people interact in a certain environment. Green (2001) indicates that taking the time to consider this promotes respect for moral, political, and ethical elements in the environment. Taut and Brauns (2003) also described barriers and resistance to evaluation, to include organizational resistance to change and psychological factors. They highlight how resistance can arise from many factors including disagreement over the approaches used in the evaluation, the context of the evaluation, and/or the stakeholders impacted by the evaluation. Although they identify the negative aspects of resistance, they also suggest that there is an upside to resistance as it is an important source of information about resisters and the organization overall. Finally, Grodzicki (2014) considers an alternative element that deters evaluation culture and practice. In her study of building a culture of evidence in the community college, she found that although the institution was committed to collecting, analyzing, and reporting data about performance, the lack of capability of the institutional research office deterred the institution from routinely using data to inform institutional decisions.

Incentives or Punishments

This research project will study the impact of factors in organizations intended to promote and enforce expectations of evaluation activity. This will include factors that serve as incentives, and accountability measures that perform as punishments. As indicated above, Vroom identified that employee effort is connected to reward and that rewards can be perceived as valuable or not valuable (Vroom, 1964). In their study of influences that impact how data is used, Coburn and Turner (2011) indicate that organizational processes of data use are significantly impacted by the situational and political context. They also studied and proposed interventions that promote the use of data.

In the publication summarizing the work to increase evaluation capacity at the CDC, the team determined that growing evaluation activities at the CDC required, among other things, leadership to focus on evaluation. Also required was growing the skills of the workforce as it relates to measuring and analyzing performance, and nurturing and promoting a culture of evaluation (Milstein et al., 2002). This research study will seek to understand strategies that promote evaluation activities and culture. Goh and Richards (1997) describe conditions that promote a learning organization and identify that while leader commitment is important, creating a climate that promotes experimentation and rewards is important as well, including making failures acceptable and normal.

A culture that values evaluation and rewards learning provides employees with the sense that they can take risks and still be protected (Preskill & Torres, 1999b). This environment provides an incentive to learn about performance and instills trust and courage in employees. Conversely, punitive factors that discourage evaluation include the failure to reward or recognize work units that implement a focus on results, and a culture in which setting unrealistic targets results in criticisms about lack of performance (Mayne, 2010). Morest and Jenkins (2007) identify that making the transition to a more data driven organization and one that gathers information to improve performance, requires an important culture shift, they suggest that "stakeholders throughout the college must recognize and accept the quality and legitimacy of internal research findings about student progress" (p. 4).

Incentives, while suspected to motivate particular performance, are not always effective. In a study of incentives by Chng, Rodgers, Shih, & Song (2012), a strong sense of confidence about the work that needed to be accomplished positively impacted managerial behavior more than an incentive structure, and incentives failed to motivate those managers with a lower sense of confidence. Employee preference is also a factor for consideration in the use of incentives. Vroom (1964), as described above, also focused on the importance of determining if employees will value rewards intended to promote motivation and performance. Pouliakas and Theodossiou (2012) argued that the context of the organization shaped the optimal design of motivational factors. As the CDC worked to grow evaluation capacity and culture, Milstein et al., (2002) determined that leadership, incentives, and long-term culture change were essential.

Like the findings of Pouliakas and Theodossiou (2012) and Chng et al. (2012), other research identifies that employee motivations are heavily impacted by job design and the perceptions of the employee about their own ability to do the job. Grant (2010) indicates that improvements to job design and improvements to employee ability can quickly impact performance and motivation. Similarly, another study reinforced that training, along with other organizational factors in the environment, improved motivation (Khan, 2012). In these cases, rewards can come in the form of training, attention to the design of work, and organizational factors (Mayne, 2010).

The research literature also addresses the issue of motivation to participate in evaluation activities and mandated evaluation programs and activities. Katz et al. (2002)

describe the value of evaluative data and indicate that the education sector is using performance data to make decisions in all areas. They indicate that mandated evaluation requirements can promote accountability and organizational improvement. However, there are factors that serve as disincentives to engage in evaluation activities include lack of organizational interest in results, insufficient resources to conduct evaluation activities, lack of trust in evaluation results, and accountability that focuses on rules (Mayne, 2010). Mandated evaluation that focuses on accountability may be counter-productive for organizations (Chelimsky, 1997). Chelimsky (1997) indicated that evaluation that focused largely on accountability, as is required by funders, may under-represent the value of evaluation as a tool for performance improvement rather than what is perceived as a process to focus on what's wrong. Further, in a report of the success of the implementation of an evaluation strategy in the Queensland Department of Education in Australia, there was strong evidence that an evaluation culture had been well adopted and that the approach used was a management change model rather than a compliance approach (Hanwright & Makinson, 2008). While this approach may not account for the success of the implementation, characteristics such as employee engagement and development, and focus on the real value of knowing about performance, helped the organization embed evaluation into everyday business (Hanwright & Makinson, 2008). Finally, as described above, the impact of leaders on organizational culture is important. In her research of critical characteristics of community college presidents, Plinske (2008) found nine essential qualities, including; the ability to listen carefully to the point of view of others, understanding the value of a team, ability to establish trust, and capable of communicating about and obtaining buy-in for a vision.

Building a Culture of Evaluation and Evidence

As community colleges continue to promote the mission of open access and provide educational opportunity to low-income, minority, and underprepared students, while also dealing with the difficulty of decreasing resources, the challenge to retain and graduate students is daunting. Underprepared students at community colleges and four-year institutions is alarmingly high according to Levin and Calcagno (2008) and in their research describing evaluation in community colleges, they indicate that higher education will need to work to understand how to improve student outcomes. They also indicate that community colleges should build capacity to experiment and then systematically evaluate interventions and initiatives. Authors Bailey and Alfonso (2005) describe building a culture of evidence that reinforces the importance of using data to inform decisions, and moving distinctly away from the use of anecdotal information to inform practice. They also describe a culture of evidence as an organization that regularly gathers information about performance and uses it to inform decisions.

In an effort to help community colleges gain insight on their own capacity to gather and use information to make decisions, McClenney and McClenney (2003) developed the McClenney's Community College Inventory as a tool to help self-assess the culture of evidence. Two items in the tool include

1) “The institutional climate promotes the willingness to rigorously examine and openly discuss institutional performance among governing board members, administrators, faculty, staff, and students, and,

2) The institution regularly assesses its performance and progress in implementing educational practices which evidence shows will contribute to higher levels of student persistence and learning" (p. 3).

As mentioned above, authors Morest and Jenkins (2007) suggest that community colleges do not evaluate the impact of their programs routinely and when they do, they often do not use the results to make improvements in their approaches.

It is difficult to deny that organizational culture influences nearly all aspects of performance including engagement in evaluation activities (Coburn & Turner, 2011; Schein, 1996). Smith (2014) described the importance of awareness of culture when looking at organizational improvement and change. He argued that, "To manage change in an organization requires sensitivity to these processes and the ability to bring culture to organizational consciousness. It can be discussed and evaluated for its relevance to current needs" (p. 61)

Schein (1996) defined culture as “a set of basic tacit assumptions about how the world is and ought to be that a group of people share and that determines their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, and, to some degree, their overt behavior” (p. 11). This definition of culture is used to reflect the importance of perception when studying organizational culture. Schein (1985) also argued that culture was difficult to define by insiders alone or external people alone; he suggested that collaboration between insiders and external people can help identify and clarify assumptions. He also argued that the primary function of leadership was to develop and evolve the culture that promoted the best outcomes and results of the organization.

Many discussions of culture focus on how culture impacts organizational change and performance. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) indicate that there are three levels of culture. They indicate that a surface level of culture is indicated by artefacts and products, then a deeper level is revealed through norms and values. Finally, they describe the deepest level at which basic assumptions are rarely verbalized, are widely understood. Similarly, Taylor (2005) described how cultural messages where communicated in organizations and indicated that behaviors, symbols, and systems were the primary communication mechanisms. She suggested that changes intended to alter culture should consider attention to impacting these mechanisms. Further, leaders should ensure that as they validate assumptions about culture, they should avoid assuming that the culture they see and experience is the culture known to other members of the organization (Detert et al., 2000).

Bradley (2004) indicates that the issue of integrating evaluation practice into culture and context of the organization is as important as building skills and knowledge about evaluation practice. Mayne (2010) describes an organization that promotes evaluation as one that seeks out information that sheds light on performance in order to improve programs and services. He also indicated that a weak evaluation culture is one in which organizations fail to use evaluation information, discourage risk-taking, and place more value on outputs rather than achieving outcomes. Preskill and Torres (1999b) describe challenges that organizations will face if their culture is not ready for evaluation. Some of these challenges include a culture in which leaders talk about learning and improving but do not model learning, evaluative activities that are seen as an event rather than an ongoing orientation, and finally, a culture in which dialogue and asking questions is not valued.

Similarly, Katz et al. (2002) described an organization with an evaluation culture as one that maintained evaluation activities even after the requirement had ended. He also suggested that engaging employees in guided evaluation activities reinforced an evaluation habit. Mayne (2010) suggested that embedding evaluation into processes helped to promote an evaluation culture. He indicated that processes such as planning, budgeting, and reporting should require evidence about results, and that by doing this, the value of checking on performance becomes a normal part of doing business.

In a report of the implementation of an evaluation strategy in Australia, authors noted that there was strong evidence that the organization had developed an evaluation culture. This evidence included the fact that staff initiated evaluations and used the framework and processes set in place to perform evaluations (Hanwright & Makinson, 2008). In this Australian organization, the implementation focused on change management rather than a compliance approach.

Finally, it is obvious that leaders make a profound impact on culture. As described above, Schein (1985) argued that the primary function, if not the only function of leadership, was to develop and evolve the culture that promoted the best outcomes and results of the organization. Describing the ideal leader, Mellow and Heelen (2014) argue "the ideal leader has vision, makes expert use of data from the field, and builds a team that can implement the necessary foundation to achieve the dream, solidly based on the evidence of what works" (p. 134). They further describe that the community college president possesses professional proficiency in understanding, maintaining, and improving high standards through continuous improvement. Lastly, a study by Rebolloso et al. (2005) revealed a climate of conservatism that made the appearance of being open to ideas but rarely implemented new ideas. In this environment, leaders reinforced a culture of bureaucratic control and negativity towards change, damaging the potential positive impacts of seeking insight into what was working and not working at the organization.

Although Preskill and Torres (1999b) indicate that in learning organizations, leaders are everywhere, and at all levels of the organization, they also emphasize that evaluative inquiry and organizational learning will not be sustained if top level leaders are indifferent to learning about performance and outcomes. Schwandt (2008) emphasized the need for leaders to promote a culture that values evaluation intrinsically as well as for instrumental reasons. He noted that evaluation was the mechanism that could be used to combat reliance on “spin” and restore and maintain confidence in the organization. Finally, leaders must be committed to the goals of the organization and to the practice of learning. In doing this, leaders promote a culture of trust in which failures are part of learning and improving (Goh & Richards, 1997).

Chapter III – Methodology

PART 1 – Introduction and Overview

Purpose and research question. This research was conducted to gain insight into strategies that promote a culture of evaluation or closing the loop as it relates to performance of programs and initiatives in public community colleges. The term "program" in this study refers to an established series of events or actions that lead to a goal and result, such as a student tutorial support program or student food subsidy program. An "initiative" in the study refers to any new activities, or events, established to reach a goal and outcome, such as a new counseling effort to help students decrease financial aid debt. This study will provide insight into the qualities of organizational culture and behavior that promote the practice of evaluation. Finally, this study also focused on factors that are presumed to impact employee motivation and behavior. In doing this, the research will address the following questions:

1. *In high performing public community colleges, what **qualities and characteristics** of the organization promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?*
2. *In high performing public community colleges, what **strategies** promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?*

Rationale for using a qualitative research approach. In this study, an information-gathering tool (the survey sent to community college participants) contained both qualitative and quantitative questions. Although the study focused on qualitative responses from participants, some quantitative questions were presented. Mixing techniques in the survey structure promoted the ability to generalize, added to the breadth and scope of insight, and provided the opportunity for one approach to inform the other (Creswell, 2009). In the present study, quantitative questions provided insight into the volume of evaluation activities and types of strategies used. As Creswell (2015) also indicates, combining qualitative and quantitative elements in a study helps to "obtain two different perspectives, one drawn from closed-ended response data (quantitative) and one drawn from open-ended personal data (qualitative)" (p. 15). Qualitative approaches provide the opportunity to explore values, perspectives, and motivations (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2005). Creswell (2013) suggests that using a qualitative approach provides the opportunity to delve into more complex issues and dig deeper into what is behind organizational performance.

Finally, an Appreciate Inquiry approach was used in the development of survey questions. An Appreciative Inquiry approach enables the focus to remain on what is working and the possibilities of expanding upon what is working rather than focus placed upon deficits (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003). Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2003) describe that using the Appreciate Inquiry approach embraces the strengths in organizations and seeks to use those strengths to expand the organization into more effective performance. In applying this approach in the present study, participants were asked to identify strategies that promote desired outcomes, and therefore, were not asked to identify or describe any performance gaps or negative qualities associated with their approaches and actions. This approach was used in question design in order to help promote participation and reporting by these Aspen Institute recognized institutions.

Rationale for tradition and genre. As described above, the questionnaire (See Appendix A) focused primarily on the opportunity to gain qualitative information. Qualitative research is framed within the context of empiricism, which emphasizes the importance of experience itself (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). This research begins with the positivist perspective in combination with interpretivism; taking from the positivist paradigm only the portion that centers around a status quo perspective and applying it to organizational functioning that can be improved (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Most predominantly, interpretivism frames the thinking and approaches on this research as it contends that individuals who exist in educational institutions, as human environments, construct and shape these environments (Gall et al., 2005; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). In the survey used in this study, representatives from community colleges answered open-ended questions about practices, approaches, social environment and culture, and employee motivations and perceptions. Some participants agreed to participate in a subsequent telephone interview. This approach reflects the interpretivist tradition as the participants who were interviewed, engaged in the community college environment, and therefore participate in shaping the environment and describing the environment.

This study also applied the collective case study approach. The collective case study approach seeks to reach out to a sub-set of a larger group, in this case, the larger group of public community colleges across the U.S. and the sub-set being those high-performing schools recognized by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. Yin (1994) indicates that case studies enable valuable clarification of the “how” and “why” elements of a phenomenon. Mariano (2000) describes varying types of case study research including exploratory, confirmatory, descriptive, and explanatory. This study is descriptive as well as explanatory as the purpose is to describe elements related to evaluation capacity in community colleges and to explain elements that might influence attitudes about and engagement in evaluation activities. For example, participants were asked to identify the impact that incentives and accountability have on motivation to participate in evaluation activities.

Stake (1995) indicates that the number and type of cases studied depends upon what the researcher is trying to accomplish. He suggests that approaches include the instrumental, intrinsic, and collective case study. In describing the types of case studies, Stake (2006) indicates that intrinsic case study applies when a researcher is interested in a particular case without interest in also generalizing, and the instrumental case study offers the opportunity to focus on an issue or phenomenon as illustrated through the case. An important difference between the intrinsic case study and the instrumental case study is the purpose (Stake, 2006). Finally, Stake (2006) describes the third type of case study as the collective case study, which enables the researcher to collect data from a number of cases in order to gain a better understanding of a particular phenomenon. In this study, the collective case study approach provides the opportunity to better understand what works in building an evaluation culture and practice in community colleges.

Brief overview of study. Using the collective case study approach, information was gathered through an electronic survey sent to representatives at community colleges via email addresses and through potential follow-up interviews. Interviews were conducted over the telephone, in cases where survey participants provided consent to participate and then provided their name, telephone number, and email address. These interviews provided the opportunity for participants to elaborate on responses to the survey questions. As described in the next paragraph, all community colleges that have received recognition from the Aspen Institute for community college excellence were targeted for participation in this collective case study. This recognition from the Aspen Institute includes winners of the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, Finalists with Distinction, Finalists, and Rising Star recipients. Representatives from these institutions were invited to take the online survey that contains quantitative and qualitative questions. The target individual was the person responsible for the college accreditation program. If the response rate had been poor, other individuals in the office or organization would have been contacted via email for participation with a possible next target to be the office most closely associated with institutional effectiveness.

PART 2 – Research Sample

As briefly described above, the population targeted in this study was key personnel from thirty-four (34) public community colleges across the U.S. recognized by the Aspen Institute for community college excellence. No other limiting characteristics were applied. Specifically, since the beginning of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program in 2011, community colleges have been recognized for various levels and types of achievements. The Aspen recognition serves as "the nation's signature recognition of high achievement and performance among America's community colleges" (Aspen Institute, 2017). At this point, past recognition from the College Excellence Program includes; the five (5) community colleges that received the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence (awarded to those who endeavor and achieve excellent results in student success); six (6) community colleges have been Finalists with Distinction; twenty (20) colleges have been Finalists, and finally, and three (3) community colleges received recognition as Rising Stars, an award given to colleges for rapid student improvement (Aspen Institute, 2017). The goals of the Aspen Prize include:

1) Identify and celebrate excellence

2) Coalesce around a clear definition of student success

3) Stimulate replication of exceptional practice

PART 3 – Overview of Information Needed

Once completed by participants, the survey results provided insight into the presence (or not) of strategies that promote and support a culture and practice of evaluation. Evaluation, for this research, refers to deliberate study and checking into the impact of programs, strategies, initiatives, and processes with the intention to learn whether they achieve intended outcomes. Information needed from participants included demographic information about the participant and the organization, information about the context in which the participant works and information that helps connect the theoretical assumptions in this study with situational realities as interpreted by the researcher.

The demographic information asked of participants included the size of institution as indicated by student headcount in most recent fall term, full-time employee volume, and position held by individual completing the survey. Also, understanding the context in which the participant works is important. In order to gain insight into context, participants were asked whether there is a position or positions in the organization related to evaluation or measurement of the performance of initiatives. Also related to context, participants were asked questions about accountability and the culture of performance improvement.

Additionally, it was important to obtain information related to the perceptions of the participants on matters including motivations of employees, accountability, incentives, employee engagement, and leadership actions. Finally, it was also important that this study resulted in information that helps clarify the connection between theoretical assumptions that drive the nature of the questions and the perceived reality as the researcher identifies the connection from the verbal and written responses. Specifically, as previously discussed, Denison and Mishra's Organizational Culture and Effectiveness Theory described elements of employee involvement, consistency of leader actions, and general organizational activities, and Vroom's Expectancy Motivation Theory described such elements as the role that rewards play in employee motivation. Both of these theories informed the framework of the questionnaire.

PART 4 – Research Design Overview

There were ten (10) discreet steps in the data collection and analysis for this study and all will be described in greater detail below. The following graphic (Figure 3.1) provides a visual overview of these steps.

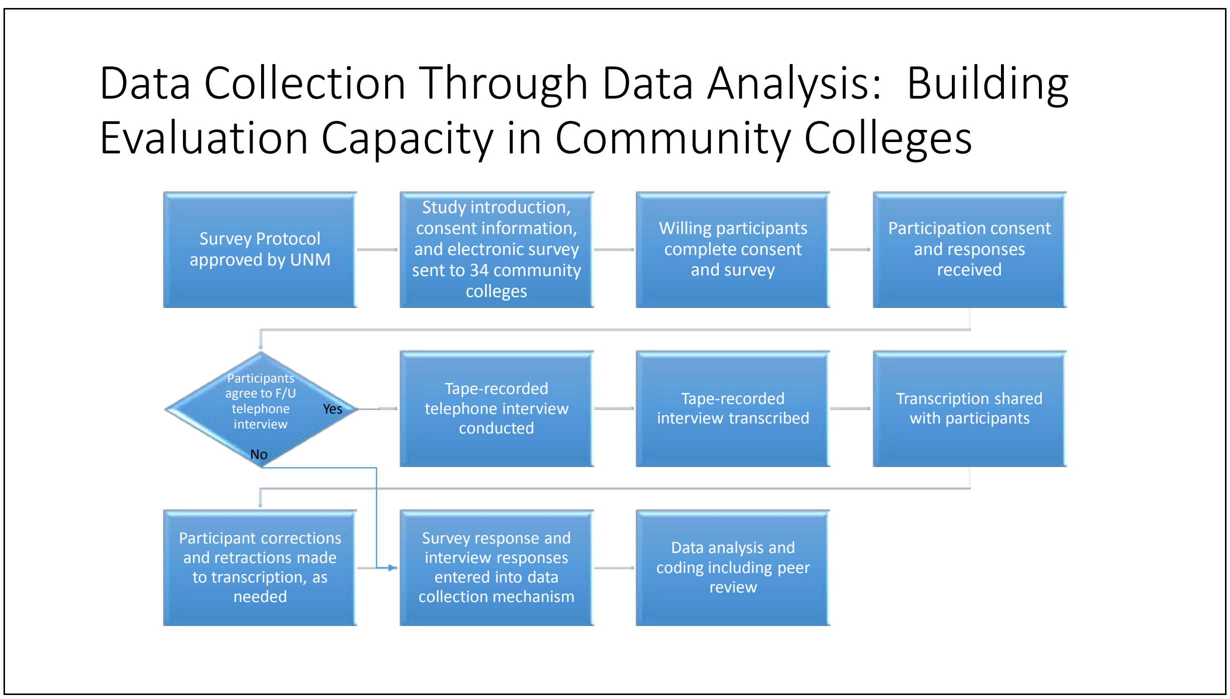

Figure 3.1. Visual and Analysis Steps for Data Collection.

While the graphic provides more detail, three overarching steps are illustrated. First, the electronic survey as approved by the University of New Mexico Office of the

Institutional Review Board was sent via email to the thirty-four (34) community colleges recognized by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. As described above, the lead individual in the organization responsible for the college accreditation program was the target for completion of the survey. Next, participants completing the survey and willing to participate in a telephone interview were contacted to elaborate on survey responses. Telephone interviews were audio recorded. Finally, the last phase included archiving responses received from participants on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet followed by data analysis. This includes cataloging both qualitative and quantitative responses. In cases where participants agreed to a follow-up telephone conversation to elaborate on responses, those responses were included in the spreadsheet but identified as information gathered via telephone. For the qualitative responses, methods and strategies for synthesizing and summarizing responses followed guidelines described by qualitative research authority Johnny Saldana (2016).

PART 5 – Maintaining Data Confidentiality and Informing Participants

For this study, the researcher agreed to obtain, handle, store, and share research information in a confidential matter consistent with current research protocols developed and approved by the University of New Mexico Office of the Institutional Review Board. This was done to ensure that information obtained from participants was confidentially handled and not improperly divulged. Finally, for this study, data refers to numeric information and qualitative information obtained from the electronic survey and from the telephone interviews. This included audio tapes of interviews.

Anonymous Electronic Survey - Participants who receive the electronic survey via email received the Informed Consent indicating that if they do not wish to participate in a follow-up telephone interview, all submissions of the electronic survey will be anonymous. Any capabilities to track electronic devices were disabled in order to preserve anonymity. Identification of participants targeted for completion of the electronic survey was accomplished via access to the community college websites. The individual responsible for the college accreditation program was the specific individual solicited for participation. The person responsible for accreditation is typically well versed in the structures and practices at the college related to performance improvement and college results. Performance improvement and measuring the impact of initiatives and programs, are typical areas addressed in accreditation reports and assessments. In the event that the response rate is low, a secondary source would have been found in an office of institutional effectiveness, which often oversees institutional research, student learning assessment, and performance measurement initiatives.

The following practices were observed in the handling of research data obtained during this study;

- Participants who agreed to participate in a follow-up telephone interview had their identity masked through the use of a control number which occurred following the completion of the interview when the identity was placed in a code matrix. The code matrix was maintained in a separate location from the information containing the participant code and corresponding information. Access to the code matrix was confined to the single researcher in this study.
- Social Security Numbers were not collected.
- Identification of participants was removed from completed survey instruments; including identification removed from notes taken during telephone interviews.

- Because the size of the full population in this study was only thirty-four (34) institutions and all well-known institutions recognized by the Aspen Institute, any information that allowed identity disclosure was not used in the study, for example, size of student headcount and employee volume.
- Destruction of Participant Identifying Information: The code matrix, contact lists, and any other documents that contained participant identification will be destroyed immediately when the research is completed, and any required retention period has been observed.
- Electronic Storage and Materials: Files containing electronic information was password-protected at all times. Paper materials were stored in a locked desk. Results from the Survey Monkey tool was maintained in an account where no other individuals had access to the survey (this is not a shared Survey Monkey account).
- Handling Participant Information: The single researcher in this study collected and maintained all information that contained participant identification.
- Protection of Audio Records: Audio recordings of telephone interviews were stored electronically in a secure password protected computer database. Audio files were numbered. The principle investigator in this study and the service hired to transcribe the recordings had access to these recordings. Those transcribing will only have access to code identifiers, not identities.
- Protection during Data Analysis: Data analysis was conducted by the single researcher in this study and qualitative analysis was reviewed with one research

peer. All identifiable participant information was removed during the review of qualitative data analysis with the research peer.

- Protection while Presenting Data: During presentation of this research, there was no connection between college identity and data. This was done by removing reference to identifiers such as name of school and school size.

Informing participants of confidentiality protections and study limitations. Participants targeted for participation received an email requesting their participation in the study. The email contained an explanation of the study as well as the Informed Consent authorization. The Informed Consent indicated that minimal risk would be associated with participation in this study particularly for individuals who choose to only respond to the anonymous survey and not participate in the optional telephone follow-up interview. The Informed Consent communicated the following to participants:

- How the information will be used; this will exclusively focus on describing this dissertation research project.
- If participants agree to a telephone interview, that the interviews will be audio recorded.
- All individuals who will have access to the data collected; this includes the peer reviewer of qualitative analysis and the person transcribing audio recordings.
- Specific procedures in place to minimize unauthorized access to the research data.

PART 6 – Data Collection Methods

Electronic survey and optional follow-up telephone interview. Data collection centered upon the electronic survey sent via email using SurveyMonkey, an online survey software, to select community college representatives as described above. The survey instrument and cover letter asked participants to complete the online survey and asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview expanding upon their responses to the electronic survey.

Archer (2003) indicates the most significant advancements in survey technology in the twentieth century have included the use of the telephone, random sampling, and the electronic survey. The questionnaire in the present study, sent to participants via email and contained within an electronic online survey software, included nineteen (19) questions focused on understanding participant perspectives on evaluation strategies and attitudes at their institution.

Dillman (2000) describes advantages in the use of an electronic survey to include ease of administration, low cost, ease of accumulating response data, and electronic reminders that can be easily operationalized. Joel and Mathur (2005) found online surveys have advantages over other formats as long as the inherent weaknesses could be addressed. They identified weaknesses to include low response rate and unclear instructions to participants. For this study, the electronic survey was tested with six community college colleagues.

In this study, it was anticipated that participants would agree to a follow-up telephone interview. Interviews are the most used method of data collection in qualitative research (Nunkoosing, 2005), and Patton (1990) described the interview as an opportunity to understand something that could not be observed. Semi-structured interviews allow the opportunity to dig deeper, explore, and probe into issues as they arise (Newman, 1976). Hancock and Algozzine (2006) indicate that "Semi-structured interviews are particularly well-suited for case study research" (p. 40), and in this case, semi-structured interviews over the telephone with willing participants would enable flexibility in pursuing issues and topics as they arise. Telephone interviews in this study started with the survey question responses and provided the opportunity for participants to elaborate. Finally, Gillham (2005) indicates that telephone interviews for qualitative research have grown in use in the last several decades but also include some inherent disadvantages.

Gillham and others, identify that, while conducting a telephone interview, strategies are needed to compensate for disadvantages; disadvantages include lack of personal connection leading to superficial exchange of information (Gillham, 2005; Irvine, 2011; Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013; Novick 2008). Compensations for disadvantages can include preparing the interviewee in advance, taking deliberate time to gain rapport, carefully observing duration of interview, employing techniques to maintain attention, and conveying understanding and interest (Gillham, 2005; Irvine, 2011; Irvine et al., 2013; Novick, 2008). Not taking time to build rapport and familiarity is identified as an important factor in limiting the quality and volume of information exchanged in the telephone interview (Irvine, 2011). The researcher in this study will understand best practice telephone interview techniques including focus on lessons learned in telephone interviewing research (Burke & Miller, 2001; Irvine, 2011). This includes gaining insight in pre-interview actions, considerations of length of interview, and after-interview considerations (Burke & Miller, 2001; MacDougall & Fudge, 2001). Although research has suggested that these disadvantages, such as the lack of visual cues, might limit the quality of the research, Novick (2008) and Irvine et al. (2013) found little evidence that this occurs and identified distance may even promote a more open disclosure of information. Also, Irvine et al. (2013) found that interviewees compensated for the lack of visual confirmation by checking with the interviewer to ensure information provided was meeting the needs of the interviewer.

PART 7 – Data Analysis and Synthesis

Interview analysis. The Principle Interviewer (PI) collated and organized responses from the electronic surveys and separately collated and organized responses from the follow-up telephone interviews and conduct the first review of data. The PI used a qualified research assistant to review transcripts and review coding and theme/categories. The research assistant was experienced in the coding and bundling qualitative research so require no training prior to reviewing the coding and theme categories recommended. Pre-set categories were not identified.

Data analysis followed the approaches described by Saldana (2016), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Creswell (2013). Data analysis included review of themes and patterns found in the descriptions in the survey as well as interview transcripts from the follow-up interviews to include stories, explanations, examples, and terms used by the interviewees (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) and then moving on to code and categorize the themes. Coding was used to organize the content and promote placement of content into manageable segments and groupings. Analysis focused on identifying categories and themes. The content analysis will begin with a pre-existing framework and be informed from the literature, but still allowing themes to emerge (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2009). This approach includes a data reduction phase, the data display phase, and finally the development of conclusions. Data reduction refers to continuous review of data to develop codes from chunks of data that will be organized into categories and broader themes. Data analysis was facilitated through the use of charts, tables, matrices, and diagrams that promote clarity in revealing relationships and networks.

Database and technology. Interview transcripts were stored in a computer database in order to ensure security and promote ease of access and sorting. Data coding, categorization, and analysis was done manually rather than through assistance of computer software.

PART 8 – Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations. This research proposal was submitted to the University of New Mexico Office of the Institutional Review Board prior to beginning the study. Appropriate consents were provided to all participants in the study as well as explanation and clarification of all aspects of the purpose and intention of the research, and how the results of the research will be shared. All participants were informed of the protections for confidentiality and anonymity. Finally, all participants who agree to a follow-up telephone interview were informed that, if so requested, they will be provided with the transcript of the audio-recording. If participants request that elements of the transcription be removed from inclusion in the data, this request will be honored. As noted above, participants completing the online survey may not be willing to participate in the follow-up telephone interview and will not have a follow-up contact.

PART 9 – Issues of Trustworthiness

In this study, it is acknowledged that one of the most important elements of qualitative research is the rigor of the research process. For this case study proposal, rigor refers to credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Strategies to reinforce rigor are described below.

Credibility. Several strategies will be implemented to ensure the credibility of this research process and result including member checking, peer review, and intentional reviews of the personal impact of the researcher on the research process (Krefting, 1990). Member checking included providing transcripts to individual participants who participated in the telephone interview in order to provide the opportunity to remove or change information. Peer review of the qualitative analysis approaches were used in order to inform the coding process and results.

Dependability. Dependability was reinforced through the presentation of a written map identifying the research path and decisions behind the path (Creswell, 2013). The presentation of this collective case study included the following essential elements; specific purpose and description of the study; identifying the criteria for selection into the study; data analysis process and interpretation of the results; how data was collected; timeframe for collection of data; and identifying judgments about credibility.

Confirmability. Confirmability was sought through the use of the peer reviewer as described above who was used to review the research process decisions (Krefting, 1990). This reviewer was different from the one peer researcher assisting to review the transcripts and decisions about findings. A record was maintained by the principal researcher cataloging the research process and evolving decision elements and was provided to the research reviewer.

Validity. Attention to elements impacting validity sought to ensure that findings in this study represented the phenomenon and issues that the study claims to represent (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). With this in mind, focus was placed on factors that could promote untruthful or inaccurate reporting not intended by participants. The survey tool was tested by representatives in a New Mexico community college to ensure that questions were understandable and that clarification of terms or questions in the survey were made as needed. With the exception of the survey question related to student headcount during the most recent completed fall term, all information needed to respond to the questions should be available to participants. For example, participants were asked questions about leadership involvement and employee engagement and these responses will necessarily be strictly related to perception.

Crystallization. Crystallization was used as a data analysis technique to promote taking a step back and thinking creatively about the data. Ellingson (2008) describes this as taking the opportunity to think about other aspects of data such as using storytelling or pictures to understand and gain insight into the topic. This was done during the current study when telephone interviews enabled the opportunity for participants to recall examples and experiences that provided elaboration of their point. This promoted the opportunity to think about alternative ways to think about analysis, a type of meta-thinking experience. Borkan (1999) described this as the process of temporarily suspending the traditional activities associated with data immersion and taking a step back to think about different ways to look at data, or looking at the same data through a different lens (Ellingson, 2008). This promoted a thoughtful reflection during the current research study.

Reflexivity. Reflexivity as an element of validity was addressed during data analysis to ensure accuracy of interpretation of data. This requires deliberate strategies to ensure awareness and insight into researcher bias including planning early in the research process how thinking about personal bias will be addressed (McCabe & Holmes, 2009). Discussing interpretations with a research colleague will help to ensure that interpretations of the meaning of things are accurate and not overly influenced by personal experience.

PART 10 – Limitations and Potential Problems

Delimitations. From the perspective of scope, this study is limited to study of a few factors that are identified to impact an evaluation culture; the study does not seek to identify all factors or influences on evaluation culture. Additionally, this study seeks information about evaluation from organizations recognized through the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. Therefore, only 34 community colleges are targeted for participation in the study. Scope is therefore also limited to institutions recognized for high performance in student success outcome of retention and graduation.

Limitations.

1. Small Study Population: with only thirty-four (34) community colleges recognized in the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program, the full potential population in the study is relatively small. It will be important to persist in obtaining responses.
2. Poor response rate - Community college leaders are busy, budgets are tight and not heavily staffed with people doing work. As described above, the individual at the college responsible for the college accreditation program will be contacted through email. If the response rate is poor, other individuals in the office or organization will be contacted via email for participation. The electronic survey asks survey participants if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview to expand on survey responses. There may be a limited

number of survey respondents who are willing to also participate in the telephone interview resulting in a limited amount of elaboration and insight on responses.

3. Use of an electronic email survey as principle method for gathering qualitative information may result in limited insight into the meaning of participant responses. The follow-up option to participate in a telephone interview to dig deeper into survey responses is the only approach available to provide more insight into meaning of responses. Where participants do not agree to a follow-up telephone interview, insight is limited.
4. Limited triangulation exists.

Summary of Study

This study will seek to gain insight into strategies that promote evaluation in high-performing community colleges. Evaluation refers to activities aimed at determining the success and outcomes of programs or initiatives to clarify goal achievement. Community colleges targeted for participation in this survey are the thirty-four (34) colleges recognized by the Aspen Institute in the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. Representatives of the community college will be invited via email to participate in an anonymous study utilizing an electronic survey containing nineteen (19) questions that seek to clarify strategies that promote a culture of accountability and participation in evaluation activities. Participants will also be invited to participate in a follow-up telephone interview intended to dig deeper and clarify the content and meaning of survey responses.

This research is intended for use in community colleges seeking to recognize the importance of evaluation in the context of institutional effectiveness, to therefore improve the capability to use data to inform decisions, and to promote more effective and timely interventions that lead to community college student success.

Chapter IV – Results

Introduction

Research indicates that evaluation activities are important to promote efficacy and credibility in and ongoing support of higher education. As the U.S. has declined in award completion the public and policy makers question the public commitment to funding higher education (Juszkiewicz, 2016). Additionally, accountability in higher education has become increasingly important (Mellow & Heelen (2014). In order to promote broader use and success in creating and maintaining a culture of evaluation (or closing the loop), this research sought to learn from high-performing community colleges strategies and characteristics that promote evaluation practice.

This study used the collective case study approach. The collective case study approach seeks to reach out to a sub-set of a larger group, in this case, the larger group of public community colleges across the United States and the sub-set being those high-performing schools recognized by the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program. This study is descriptive, as well as explanatory, as the purpose is to describe elements related to evaluation capacity in community colleges and to explain elements that might influence attitudes about and engagement in evaluation activities.

Participant Description

As briefly described above, the population targeted in this study was key personnel from thirty-four (34) public community colleges across the United States recognized by the Aspen Institute for community college excellence. Community colleges in the study group have been recognized for various levels and types of achievements including the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, Finalists with Distinction, Finalist, and the Rising Star recognition for community college excellence. Specifically, since the beginning of the Aspen Institute College Excellence Program in 2011, community colleges have been recognized for various levels and types of achievements. At this point, past recognition from the College Excellence Program includes; the five (5) community colleges that received the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence (awarded to those who endeavor and achieve excellent results in student success); six (6) community colleges have been Finalists with Distinction; twenty (20) colleges have been Finalists, and finally, three (3) community colleges received recognition as Rising Stars, an award given to colleges for rapid student improvement (Aspen Institute, 2017).

The target person for completion of the survey and discussion during a follow-up interview was the individual responsible for the college accreditation program. This person was contacted in advance of sending the survey via email in order to ensure that the survey was sent to the correct person and to improve the likelihood that the person responsible for accreditation would participate in the survey. During this telephone contact, the study was explained, and any additional information was provided to the participant.

Representatives from three colleges agreed to and participated in a follow-up telephone interview to delve more deeply into question responses. The three participants agreed to audio recording of the interview. A third party was engaged to prepare transcripts of the telephone interviews. Finally, software for qualitative analysis was not used for coding and grouping themes from the study results; spreadsheets were used to organize, group, and code qualitative responses. Qualitative approaches and results were reviewed with a qualitative research expert and university faculty member.

Addressing incomplete surveys: Item nonresponse bias. Twenty-six (26) participants of thirty-four (34) potential participants opened the survey, however only twelve (12) of the 34 community college representatives fully completed the survey. Although only twelve participants completed the survey, twenty (20) participants completed some portion of the questions. For example, 17 participants responded to Question 8, and 9 participants responded to Question 19. The lowest response on specific questions was the response volume for Question 20 with 6 responses and Question 21 with only 5 responses. Because some participants who began the survey did not complete the survey, issues related to **item nonresponse bias** were considered and described below.

Singh and Richards, (2003), describe item nonresponse as the partial completion of surveys as participants are unwilling or unable to complete all questions. Peugh and Enders (2004) indicated that missing data was reviewed to determine if there was a pattern. This is consistent with research of Leeuw, Hox, and Huisman (2003) who describe the need to understand the “missingness of data” (p. 166). They indicated there is value in understanding whether missing data were associated with a pattern or just random, or are the same questions missed. They described this as “necessary knowledge of the structure and patterns of missing data” (p. 166).

Addressing nonresponse bias. Fourteen (14) community colleges of the thirty-four (34) community colleges targeted in the study did not participate in the study. Those that did not participate either opened the survey but did not respond to any questions, or they did not open the survey at all. Because the participants in the study were anonymous, it was not possible to identify who the participants were and therefore, who was not participating. The only element of the study that was not anonymous was the follow-up telephone interview with the three participants who agreed to an interview. Examining the impact of nonresponse bias and issues such as characteristics or elements in common with nonparticipating institutions was not possible. Therefore, all participant information received was fully used and not altered.

In the analysis of the responses for this survey, it was determined that the response volume decreased as participants progressed through the survey. This result is consistent with findings of Leeuw, Hox, and Huisman (2003) in their research of prevention and treatment of nonresponse issues as they indicate that it is not uncommon that participants do not complete entire questionnaires. Additionally, it was noted that the smallest response volume, as described in the previous paragraph, was the responses to Questions 20 and 21.

For the present study, the decision was made to retain all question responses even if they were not associated with complete surveys. It was established that eliminating surveys that were not complete would be consistent with discarding valuable information. The decision was made that including responses from questionnaires that were not completed would not constitute a problematic bias. Leeuw, Hox, and Huisman (2003) also found that discarding incomplete surveys was found to be a waste of valuable information. Additionally, it was determined that no adjustments could be made for missing question responses. Finally, researchers studying item nonresponse bias (Leeuw, Hox, & Huisman, 2003; Peugh & Enders, 2004) noted that researchers make the mistake of not discussing missing data, therefore, consistent with better practice, this issue was reviewed, analyzed, and discussed in this chapter as well as the following chapter.

Processes for Analyzing Qualitative Data

The essential goal in reviewing the survey responses and elaborations provided by the follow-up telephone interviews was to organize responses into manageable bundles and derive meaning from the organization of the responses and enable a story or narrative to be presented.

A codebook or guide was not prepared prior to data collection (deductive coding), but instead inductive coding was used. A **coding in action approach** was taken which included an initial reading through all of the responses and placing initial codes and reactions in the margins of the Opinio document printout. This was done to obtain an overall sense of the responses in both content and quality of detail. It was noted early on in the review process that responses were often extremely short and limited in detailed information. Shortly thereafter, the Opinio responses were transferred to a spreadsheet containing multiple tabs (a tab for each question that contained written responses). The spreadsheet then contained a column for “code”, “category”, and “theme”.

The code was the single word or two that provided an effective summary of the comment. These one or two words represented an initial reaction or first impression of the sense of the comment. The following example represented an actual comment and code:

> *Establishing measures prior to implementation of new projects; ensuring that systems are able to collect needed data is the best strategy = CODE was “data collection”*

Next, categories were identified. This helped to organize the data further by placing related items together under the same bundle or category. Sometimes this was done with post-it notes on a wall, moving post-it notes from one category to another. An example of a set of codes placed in the same category follows:

Category was "Helping Employees"
Codes were "confusing", "disorganized", "fear", "training"

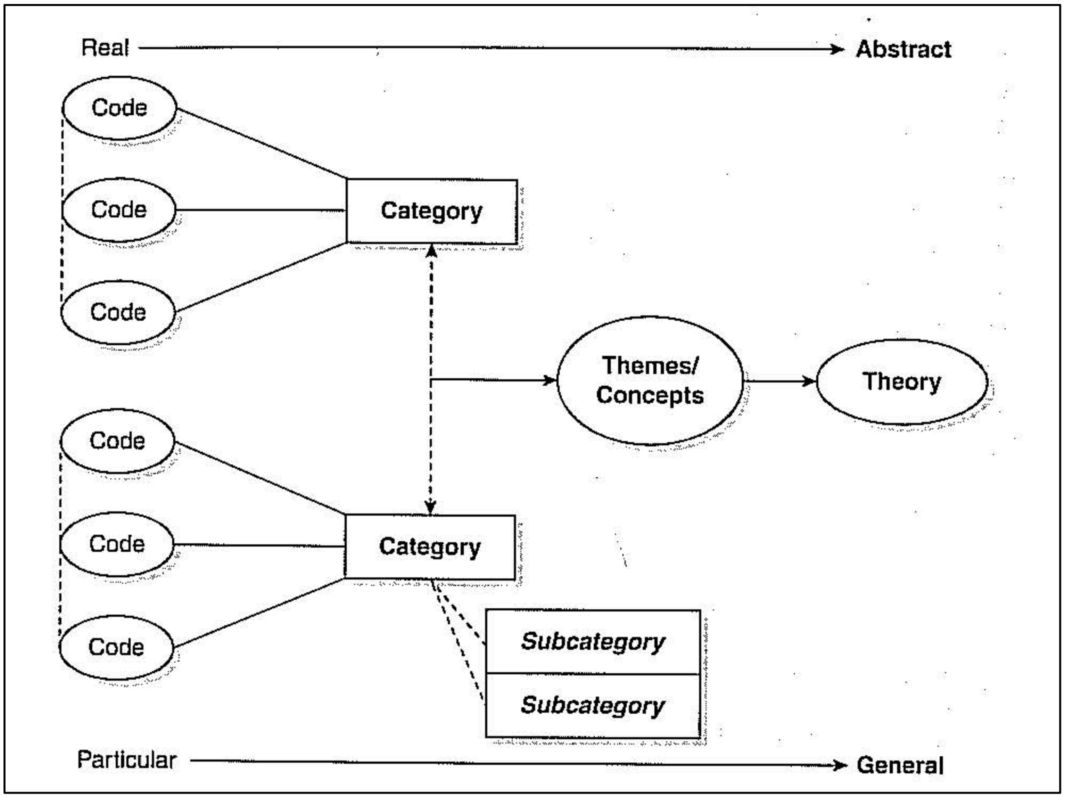

Figure 4.1. A Streamlined Codes-to-theory Model for Qualitative Inquiry (The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers, Johnny Saldana 2009, p. 12).

Because responses from participants were often very short, often one sentence, there was less complex work to tease apart the meaning of comments. Then overall themes and concepts were identified.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the results of the questionnaire and interview discussions in order to answer the central question of this study. This chapter is organized by presenting themes and examples of questionnaire and interview responses by the five specific subsections of the questionnaire. Most of the subsections asked not only about strategies that promote aspects of evaluation practice, but also about the best or most effective strategy used by the organization to promote evaluation practice. The responses to the questionnaire and interviews are presented as they relate to the two central questions of this study:

1. In high performing public community colleges, what **strategies** promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?
2. In high performing public community colleges, what **qualities and characteristics** of the organization promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?

Research Question One – Results of Strategies

In high performing public community colleges, what strategies promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?

Results of strategies - Building and reinforcing evaluation culture. The questionnaire began with a series of four questions asking participants about building and reinforcing a culture of evaluation. The following paragraphs describe the results of these questions. The first question focuses on a general question about strategies to reinforce the practice of evaluation.

***Please describe any strategies your organization uses to reinforce the practice of closing the loop (going back to check on initiatives) to ensure that new initiatives achieve their intended outcomes?* (Question 8 in the Survey).** Seventeen participants responded to this question and responses focused on three themes, (1) the planning and organizational structure for closing the loop, (2) whether there was an element of compliance associated with closing the loop (the institution had to report results) and (3) how high -profile a project or initiative was perceived to be, and whether high-level leaders were involved. The following sections describe these three themes in greater detail.

The most common theme from respondents indicated that an element of **planning and organizational structure** in place served as an effective strategy to reinforce the practice of closing the loop. This included references to committees that are responsible to hear and review results such as Program Review. Responses indicated that having a process or system in place that set standards and protocols for the measuring and reporting of results reinforced the compliance with the expectation to track and measure results. The following responses provide examples:

> *When it [evaluation] happens, it is built into the plan from the beginning, and it usually has a champion…*
>
> *New initiatives are discussed with the IE [Institutional Effectiveness] Office to establish how and when we will measure the impact of the initiative.*
>
> *We try hard to not implement anything unless it has measures attached. Most of our metrics roll up in some way to an institutional scorecard which documents our overall effectiveness. In this way we can see the impact of small and comprehensive interventions. We report to the Board of Trustees monthly on the results of a segment of the scorecard so that there is accountability for continuous improvement.*
>
> *For student success initiatives, we have committee whose role is to provide oversight and evaluation of initiatives. The Dean of Student Success follows up on retention plans to work with faculty to analyze success of the plan. Program outcome assessment is followed up by the Dean of Academics office. Reinforcing this point, one respondent indicated 'When it happens, it is built into the plan from the beginning, and it usually has a champion.'*

Comments to this question, as well as responses to other questions revealed the importance of making data more easily accessible and usable, and reinforcing the notion that an organizational structure that is in place at the institution is helpful. One response suggested:

Up until recently, we struggled with keeping the data organized enough to actually go back and report changes we made.

As a second theme, albeit with only four respondents indicated that **compliance** played a role in reinforcing the practice of closing the loop. This includes accreditation requirements and grant reporting requirements. Responses included the following:

Initiatives are tied to program review and resource request or they are part of a grant and are evaluated within the grant reporting.

Most of our initiatives are grant-funded and those have an automatic, built-in requirement of assessment and creating a next steps plan based on results.

As a final, less discussed theme, respondents indicated that if a project were **high-priority and therefore high-profile**, it was more likely that the results of the effort would be measured and reported. Along with the profile of the project, it was discussed that if high-level leaders were involved, it was more likely that the results and impacts of the project or initiative would be tracked. One respondent wrote:

The larger the initiative, the more likely it is to justify the effort to collect data and monitor outcomes.

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the significant themes for this question:

Table 4.1. Summary of Question 8 Significant Themes.

Summary – What Builds and Reinforces the Practice of Evaluation?
Planning and Organizational Structure in Place
Compliance
High Priority projects

Following the question described above ("Please describe any strategies your organization uses to reinforce the practice of closing the loop to ensure that new initiatives achieve their intended outcomes?"), participants were then asked about the **best strategy** to reinforce the practice of evaluation. The following section summarizes this result.

***Is there a strategy that works best?* (Question 9 in the Survey).** Fifteen participants responded to this question and the majority of responses suggested that the best strategy related to having a process and structure in place that would help employees to, among other things, establish goals for an initiative and keep track of goal performance. Examples from respondents included the following best strategies:

> *Establishing measures prior to implementation of new projects; ensuring that systems are able to collect needed data is the best strategy.*
>
> *Regular report-outs in formal settings; goal tracking within an area.*
>
> *An intentional focus on outcomes evaluation as part of the design process rather than after implementation seems to help.*

***Please describe any strategies or actions that are helping to reinforce this culture?* (Question 11 in the Survey)**. Putting focus on culture, participants were then asked to describe any strategies that helped to reinforce a culture of evaluation. Fifteen responses were received, and most comments focused on three areas, (1) maintaining structures and processes that establish expectations and protocols for measuring performance of initiatives, (2) leadership involvement, and (3) compliance related strategies.

Structure in Place. Responses related to strategies **maintaining structures and processes** that establish expectations and protocols, included comments such as the following:

> *Setting expectation that new initiatives have to be measured. Identify measures in advance. Also, give people access to data.*
>
> *Building closing the loop into the processes reinforces the culture.*
>
> *Strategic planning is taking on a business model that promotes results and analysis.*

Presence of Leadership. Responses related to the importance of **leadership** in strategies that promote building evaluation culture, included reference to the challenge associated with top leader turn over, and the importance of leadership engagement, as seen in the following comment:

> *The senior leadership team reinforces the importance of this every single time and leads by example.*
>
> *Hard to say [the role that leaders have played in promoting a culture of evaluation], our leadership has changed somewhat frequently over the last 12 years.*

Related to the theme of **compliance,** responses centered around the role of accreditation as a mechanism to reinforce the culture of accreditation as well as strategies such as reference to the requirement in Job Descriptions. The following comments high-light the importance of accreditation as a mechanism to reinforce the culture of closing the loop:

> *Our college has a well-established history of evaluations. We have built that culture as part of our accreditation process.*
>
> *We take accreditation very seriously, as I'm sure your institution does as well, and as you know that there's a big element of accreditation that is built upon assessment, so we have an organizational structure in which on the academic side we have program coordinators who are responsible for overseeing their programs. That includes the assessment of the program, as well as the assessment of the individual student learning outcomes associated with the program. On the non-academic side, we have unit coordinators who are responsible for assessing their programs. We use a variety of instruments, as I'm sure you do, you know, we use survey results, things like CECE [Culturally Engaging Campus Environment survey] student exit surveys. We have been using some student focus groups.*

***What has been the result of these strategies?* (Question 12 of the Survey).** An important element of studying strategies that reinforce a culture of closing the loop is seeking to understand the results of these strategies. Fourteen participants responded to this question and indicated that results of these strategies include (1) enabling the organization to understand when initiatives end up unsuccessfully, (2) encouraging higher levels of faculty engagement, and (3) promoting of a culture shift. For example, one participant indicated that one strategy that reinforces the culture of evaluation is the following:

Reminding all involved that this is critical in all that we do.

That same participant indicated the result of this strategy is:

Some initiatives and strategies are discontinued, and some are continued.

In the following comment, the participant indicated that the strategy of setting the expectation that new initiatives have to be measured, setting measures in advance, and giving people access to data has resulted in the following:

Incredible insight by faculty, we have double our graduation rate and significantly increased our retention. Faculty action has been creative and strong. We are particularly looking at closing achievement gaps across all demographic groups - disaggregating data has helped us be conscious of student success for ALL students.

In the following comment the participant indicated that the strategy of the senior leadership team reinforcing the importance of closing the loop at every opportunity and leading by example, has resulted in the following:

A gradual shift in the culture towards more emphasis on evaluation. It is still lagging in certain respects, but there is greater awareness of the value of evaluation, in part because senior leaders emphasize its importance to them and to the college.

In the following comment the participant indicated that the strategy of annual assessment days for both faculty and staff focusing on goals and measures, has resulted in the following:

The PIER office holds meetings with individual departments to discuss their annual goals and measures and guide them through the reporting process because they find the process intimidating and we relieve their fear…

Results of strategies – Evaluation practice and accountability. This section reflects and summarizes the results of three questions in the survey focused on accountability for closing the loop activities as well as strategies that promote accountability. Participants were asked three questions about the presence of accountability, accountability strategies, and results of those strategies in their organizations. The following paragraph provides the results of the first question.

***When college employees initiate new programs, employees are held accountable for evaluating the outcomes of the initiative to determine if it achieved the intended results?* (Question 13 in Survey)**. Sixteen responses were received for this question as indicated in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2. Results of Question 13.

"When college employees initiate new programs employees are held **accountable** for evaluating the outcomes of the initiative to determine if it achieved the intended results?"	
Response Options	Responses
Totally Agree	5
Somewhat Agree	8
Somewhat Disagree	3

In the following paragraphs, participant's responses to questions about accountability strategies are summarized. This next question focuses on strategies to promote accountability.

***Could you please indicate any strategy or strategies that, in your organization, effectively promote accountability for evaluating outcomes?* (Question 14 in the Survey).** In a multiple-choice question, sixteen participants responded to the question. The options were limited as participants were able to select only one response. The response volume is illustrated in Table 4.3:

Table 4.3. Results of Question 14.

"Could you please indicate any strategy or strategies that, in your organization, effectively promote accountability for evaluating outcomes?"	
Response Options	Responses
Providing Training	3
Requiring follow-up to measure outcomes	3
Leadership engagement in following up on results	8
Others	2

***What has been the result of these strategies?* (Question 15 in the Survey)**. Participants were then asked to identify the **results** of these types of strategies that promote accountability. Because most participants selected the multiple-choice option "leadership engagement in following up on results", their strategies were leadership-related. The **engagement of leaders** was associated with greater follow-through on evaluation, better adoption of evaluation as a requirement, better outcomes on initiatives, and finally, with leadership engagement, employees felt decreased fear of results of outcomes. The following comments provide insight on the perceived results of leadership engagement in promoting accountability:

> *The leadership follow-up is probably the most important. If projects just fade away and don't receive follow-up attention, there is little motivation or incentive to devote time to evaluations. We could do better at this, but new leadership is still establishing itself.*
>
> *Initiatives that were connected to President's performance assessment were tracked carefully and got done.*
>
> *Generally, if leadership is invested in the strategy, it gets evaluated for effectiveness.*
>
> *Faculty are willing to take risks knowing they have leadership support to do so. We have become less afraid of asking hard questions.*
>
> *A greater awareness and adoption of evaluation as an institutional priority. There is still a long way to go, but progress is evident.*
>
> *Higher awareness of gaps in data collections, tools that make data available, and process to support data availability.*

During a telephone interview one participant described the value of less accountability instead of more and elaborated on the need for leaders to inspire instead of holding employees accountable. The following comment was provided:

> *I think that what distinguishes a competent leader from an excellent leader is that the excellent leader is able to inspire and harness discretionary effort among the people that he or she leads. I think that that's true of an institution as well. I think at this*

college, too much accountability, too much of a heavy hand seeking to hold people accountable, would actually be counter-productive. I think our culture is that the people hold themselves accountable to the students, and that gives them a sense of higher purpose. They don't have their boss telling them, do this or you're gonna' be in trouble. They have this imaginary student group whispering in their ear, help us, help us, help us more. Why can't you do this, think different or better? That's way better than any sort of external accountability that we could employ.

An isolated comment but still notable was provided by the participant who, in the telephone interview, indicated that the strategy of assigning responsibility to a person instead of the whole team resulted in greater accountability according to the following comment:

…making one person responsible improves chances of follow-through…

Two participants who selected the strategy option, "Requiring follow-up to measure outcomes," indicated that the result of this requirement included:

Fairly consistent quality efforts, some outstanding. Our recent SACSCOC [Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges] accreditation re-affirmation certainly benefitted from evidence in UAPs [University Analysis Planning and Support] of our having 'closed the loop' departmentally across the institution.

Our action plan reporting process requires follow-up on all approved plans, resulting in teams being accountable for the actions associated with the project. Projects are being completed and new projects are limited as they must be approved action projects by the Cabinet.

Table 4.4 provides a summary of the strategies and results described here:

Table 4.4. Summary of Results of Strategies to Promote Accountability.

Summary – Results of Strategies to Promote Accountability	
Strategy	Result
Engagement of Leaders	Better follow-through, better adoption of requirement, better outcomes of initiatives, less fear of outcomes
Requiring follow-up to measure outcomes	Fairly consistent quality efforts, better accreditation outcomes
Assigning responsibility to single person not team	More likely follow-through

In summary, when provided with a series of set response options, more participants indicate that engagement of leaders effectively promotes accountability for evaluation activities. Predictably, participants indicate that this results in better follow-through and less fear of the process. Requiring evaluation and focusing responsibility on a single person also promote accountability. In the next section, the fear of evaluation is addressed in questions focusing on strategies that reduce intimidation about evaluation activities.

Results of strategies – Fear of evaluation. As described earlier, resistance to evaluation is associated with fear of results. In the next section of the questionnaire, participants responded to two questions. The two questions focused on questions about strategies that help employees feel less intimidated by evaluation activities. The following paragraphs provide summary of these comments.

***What are effective strategies used in your organization to help employees feel less intimidated and less defensive about evaluation of programs, initiatives, or processes?* (Question 16 in the Survey).** Thirteen participants responded to this question and were able select more than one response. The responses are reported in Table 4.5:

Table 4.5. Results of Question 16.

Summary of Response Options “What are effective strategies used in your organization to help employees feel less intimidated and less defensive about evaluation of programs, initiatives, or processes?”	
Response Options	Responses
Rewarding participation in evaluation	3
Regular training and development about how to evaluate outcomes of initiatives	6
Celebrate learning about results	4
Regularly talk about the need to close the loop	9
Other	4

What has been the result of these strategies (strategies to help employees feel less intimidated)? **(Second Part of Question 16 in the Survey).** As indicated above, the greatest response volume focused on **training and talking** about the need to close the loop. Then participants were asked about the result of these strategies (strategies that help employees feel less intimidated). The following section describes the participant responses.

Talking about the importance of evaluation and providing training. Ten participants described the results of the strategies they selected in the multiple-option response. Most strategies that helped employees feel less intimidated about evaluation activities include training in evaluation and talking about the importance of closing the loop. Participants described the results of these strategies and suggested that talking to and training employees makes a positive impact on their ability to embrace the challenges of evaluation activities and having the results of their work studied and brought to light. The following comments illustrate the results of these strategies.

Three participants describing the result of regularly talking to employees about the need to close the loop indicated the following result:

> *Fear of 'negative results' has been largely allayed among staff through direct experience with the annual review process. Me and my staff meet with many departments individually, and we go through their goals one at a time, and we ask directly whether they met their goal or not, and they frequently haven't. Our response is always constructive: let's understand why the goal was not met, write a reasonable explanation, and adjust it for next year based on what we now know. This is continuous improvement, not final judgment. Fear of 'negative results' is still common among faculty because the assessment process is still under development and they haven't experienced the process of viewing results constructively. However, faculty and staff talk to each other, and there are some instances where staff have explained to faculty that 'negative results' are nothing to fear.*

> *[This organization] recognized that all projects to do not meet the set objectives. As projects evolve changes are implemented and adjusted. Continuous evaluation and making recommendations/changes are valued.*

We talk a lot about having data, what does the data tell us, and how are we going to use it?

Two participants selected all four options and indicated the following results are associated with talking, training, rewarding, and celebrating:

These strategies are very effective because employees know this practice is not punitive.

More willing participants and even champions of the cause.

One notable comment regarding fear of evaluation may suggest a perception that leadership did not consider how intimidating evaluation can feel to employees as in the following comment:

Leadership does not seem to make this a consideration.

In summary, participants indicated that strategies to train and develop employees as well as strategies to talk about evaluation in a positive way promoted decreased fear of evaluation programs, initiatives, and/or processes. Participants described the decrease in fear of evaluation as a process that takes time.

Results of strategies – Motivating and engaging employees in evaluation practice. This section reflects and summarizes the results of two questions in the survey focused on strategies that **motivate** employees to participate in evaluation activities, including how to **engage** employees in evaluation practice.

***What do you think motivates employees in your organization to measure and review the impact of performance initiatives?* And (Question 21 in Survey).** Nine participants responded to this question. Responses generally focus on (1) compliance, (2) personal reward, and (3) not fully knowing what motivates employees to participate in evaluation.

Respondents indicated that employees are motivated to participate in evaluation out of **requirements and compliance** as indicated in the following comments:

> *The 'threat' of SACSCOC is probably the greatest motivation, and as much as I want to encourage the college to value assessment for the benefit it brings to our students, I accept that accreditation is a stick that everyone recognizes. The college leadership, especially the provost, provides repeated, clear messages that assessment is important and there are consequences for people who don't participate. The consequence are usually just an admonishing email from the provost and the division chair, but that is significant for our small community of scholars.*
>
> *There is a range, as I suspect is true for any group. Some faculty/staff, by training and/or nature, recognize the value of such initiatives; they appreciate the reality that any of us can improve. Others see any such impact measurement as a necessary component of their position. Still others comply out of duty or necessity, not really believing they can possibly do more or better than they are doing and have always done.*
>
> *Required assessment is one motivation as well funding to support an initiative.*

Respondents described that employees are motivated by the **desire to improve** as well as being motivated to use information that promotes improvement, as seen in the following comments:

> *Actionable information. The more abstract an evaluation is the less useful employees find it in improving their own work, the less likely they are to engage. This has been evident in our learning outcomes assessment process.*
> *External pressure and a personal interest to know if what was tried worked.*
>
> *Our college's culture is very results-oriented, so anyone who can demonstrably improve a process or system, ESPECIALLY if the impact on students is direct, is hailed as a hero.*

Finally, a **lack of awareness** related to what motivates employees may be seen in the following comments:

> *There has been so little attempt made to understand employee motivation that this can't be answered.*
>
> *I do not know at this point.*

In summary, participants indicated that the greatest motivators of employees to engage in closing the loop activities focused on the requirement to measure and report (compliance) and also the personal reward associated with knowing what works and learning about successes. It was also noted that two participants indicated the lack of understanding what motivates employees to participate in evaluation activities. The next question targets strategies that seek to engage employees in evaluation.

***What do you think is the most effective strategy or strategies used in your organization to engage employees in evaluation activities and could you identify the result of this strategy?* (Question 17 and 18 in the Survey).** Twelve and eleven participants respectively responded to these questions. Responses focused on two themes (1) support and training, and (2) talking about and framing evaluation with focus on mission. The following section elaborates on these results.

Supporting and training employees. As participants described approaches that promoted the engagement of employees in evaluation work, participants cited supportive and helpful interactions with employees. The following selected excerpts provide illustration:

> *Pairing new employees with evaluation responsibilities with seasoned employees with positive evaluation behaviors.*

This same participant described the result of this strategy to be:

> *This strategy facilitates good habits and a positive state of mind towards evaluation.*

Similarly, another participant indicated that the following strategy promoted engagement of employees in evaluation work:

> *Cordial and timely meetings with the evaluation staff.*

Another comment described a similar strategy as seen below but indicated that the results of this strategy were not fully understood yet:

> *Individualized meeting and training can be effective to convince employees that they are the one who will use the results for their improvements. Understanding their needs such as program accreditation is critical to build up relationship with participants.*

Also, the following participant comment focused on how making the process easier and more straightforward coupled with personal support and training for employees, promotes engagement:

> *The most effective strategy is this: minimize the impact on their normal workflow. This means collecting data through passive means if at all possible. In addition, have a face-to-face meeting to discuss outcomes where you provide positive reinforcement to their efforts.*

This participant indicated that the strategy resulted in the following:

> *When I arrived at this college a year ago, the annual staff assessment process was a source of significant confusion (staff didn't know what they were expected to do) and frustration (staff couldn't get their questions answered). Now, one year later, staff find the process straightforward and meaningful. Staff no longer ask 'what is this for?' and after our meetings the supervisors frequently report back to me that their staff found the discussion thoughtful and helpful. It is too early to talk about the results for faculty. They are more on-board than they were, but until we have a regular process that has been in operation for a year I really can't claim to have results.*

Taking a slightly different perspective, the following interview comment illustrated the importance of culture and the impact culture has on supporting others and ultimately, engagement in evaluation work:

> *The hardest part, I'm sure you know this, is always getting the engagement, and changing the culture in a way that people see the value of this new thing. With that value, that's the work of years, and I'm fortunate to have come in in the middle of that, so I didn't have to do all of that initial design work, or all the heavy lifting. People are willing to dig into the process because they know they have help and people will drop what they're doing to come over and support them.*

Focus on mission and talking about evaluation. The second most prominent theme in the response from participants to the question "*What do you think is the most effective* *strategy or strategies used in your organization to engage employees in evaluation activities and could you identify the result of this strategy?"* focused on the importance of framing evaluation positively and staying focused on the mission. The following comments reflect on this:

> *Keeping the focus on the social justice mission of our institution. It's about students, and not about the performance of individuals or departments. We are here to improve, so let's focus on it and not blame for what has been or is. We need creativity from every person and you can't have that if you mire in guilt or embarrassment.*

This same respondent further acknowledged the result of keeping the focus on mission instead of a focus on results that could be negative, in the following:

> *Cultural change takes time, but we are getting there. Hiring new faculty into the culture has helped as much as changing the current mindset. More and more faculty and staff are using data and asking for data. We begin almost every project now with a deep look at data and evidence.*

Similarly, a different participant made the following comment:

> *Repeated emphasis that evaluation helps employees to serve students better. Everyone is interested in doing what is in the best interest of the students, so framing it as a service to students is key.*

The participant indicated the following result of this emphasis:

> *Broader adoption of the data-informed mindset.*

In summary, support to employees through staff support and training promote engagement in evaluation activities. Also, when the real purpose of evaluation is emphasized, such as student success and how the organization can promote student achievement, promotes engagement in evaluation activities. The next paragraphs provide results related to the role of rewards and incentives and their impact on employee engagement in evaluation activities.

Results of strategies – Incentives and rewards to promote engagement in evaluation practice. This section reflects and summarizes the results of three questions focused on how organizations might use incentives to encourage evaluation activities. The first question focused on whether organizations use incentives.

In my organization, incentives are used to promote and encourage evaluation activities. (Question 19 in the Survey). Thirteen participants responded to this question as seen in Table 4.6 and illustrates that incentives are not widely used in the participant organizations.

Table 4.6. Results of Question 19.

In my organization, incentives are used to promote and encourage evaluation activities.	
Response Options	Responses
Totally Agree	1
Somewhat Agree	6
Somewhat Disagree	2
Totally disagree	4

If your organization uses incentives, how effective are these incentives in encouraging employees to participate in evaluation practices? (Question 20 part 1 in the Survey). Nine participants responded to this question. Six participants indicated that incentives where "somewhat effective" while three participants replied with "not applicable". The next question in the series sought to dig deeper into strategies related to incentives. Fewer participants responded to this upcoming question as well as the one that follows that also addresses the topic of incentives. The fewest participant responses on the entire questionnaire were received on these two upcoming questions.

If your organization uses incentives to encourage activities that measure the performance of programs, initiatives, processes, etc, could you please provide a brief description and example of these incentives? (Question 20 part 2 in Survey). Six participants responded to this question with responses primarily focusing on training and recognition. Three participant responses focused on **recognition** as it relates to incentives:

> *You asked earlier about rewards. We don't have any monetary rewards. It was very good for our institution though, when we were recognized by the Aspen Institute, as one of our faculty put it. That kind of validates all of the work that we've been doing.*

Another participant indicated the following about recognition as an incentive:

> *Not monetary or status--rather, the opportunity to highlight commitment to student success. External rewards defeat the purpose and would fall flat.*

Still another participant reinforced both the value of recognition and training as incentives in the following comment:

> *Public recognition at 4DX 'summits,' as noted above. Some faculty have traveled to professional development opportunities in- and out-of-state.*

The following participant responses indicated that training was an incentive in encouraging participation in evaluation practices as seen in the following:

> *We have paid faculty stipends to participate in 3-hours workshops. We provide 'Employee Growth Credits' to staff, and these result in additional pay, but not much additional pay. We also provide good food at most workshops and programs.*

This same participant provided the following response indicating the result of the stipends had somewhat negative results with faculty:

> *The stipends for faculty have had mixed results. Faculty take the money while complaining that their time is worth much more. The staff are more compliant. I think food is the best incentive.*

Similarly, the following participant commented:

> *We have some money available for stipends for faculty doing assessment work.*

The participant indicated a positive result of this stipend in the following comment:

Increased participation in the process.

In summary, the response rate for questions in this subsection was lower. Results indicated that incentives are not widely used and not largely impactful. Where incentives were identified in a positive light, participants indicated that positive recognition and training resources were considered to encourage employee participation in evaluation practices. Some responses to the questions indicated that participants viewed incentives as purely monetary.

Results of strategies – Leading evaluation practice. The final series in the questionnaire focused on the role of leaders in promoting evaluation practice. Participants were asked questions about how leaders demonstrate that measuring performance and using evidence to make decisions is important. The responses are described below:

In my organization, leaders communicate the importance of assessing performance of initiatives and programs **(Question 22 in the Survey).** In this first question, twelve participants responded to the question and results are summarized in Table 4.7:

Table 4.7. Results of Question 22.

In my organization, leaders communicate the importance of assessing performance of initiatives and programs	
Response Options	Responses
Totally Agree	5
Somewhat Agree	5
Somewhat Disagree	2

Following this question, participants were asked how leaders demonstrate the importance of measuring the results of initiatives and what the impact of the demonstrations have been.

***In your organization, how do leaders demonstrate that measuring performance and using evidence to make decisions is important? and what has been the impact?* (Question 23 in the Survey).** In this next question twelve participants responded, and most responses focused on two themes, (1) **engagement** with the college community and (2) **fiscal resources** provided for evaluation training and activities.

Respondents most commonly described some aspect of **engagement with the college community** that helped to indicate how leaders demonstrate the importance of evaluation. Their responses focused on activities associated with asking about results, showcasing results, applauding results, and generally being present with the college community when results are shared. The following responses are examples:

> *Leaders support professional development of staff and faculty to learn how to use evidence (assessment workshops, student success academy, webinars, etc.). They ask for and use performance evaluation data in their own jobs and roles at the institution.*

This strategy, according to the participant has resulted in the following:

> *We have seen our capacity to use information for evaluation and decision-making grow significantly. We have more and more managers and deans asking for and using data to guide their decisions and evaluate their programs.*

Additionally, participants indicated that showcasing results and positive verbal recognition resulted in the opportunity to educate others and reinforces continued practice. Another participant comment included the following:

> *Yes. After a number of key projects and initiatives, the President initiated an 'after-action' report, with 4 questions. Last Day to Register, the adoption of a First Year Experience, the implementation of a new approach to professional development and community-building--each has received an after-action report analysis.*

The result of this, according to the participant, was the following:

> *That framework has been adopted across the college and is underpinning the work of committees that have little direct contact with the President. It has suffused the thinking of lower levels of leadership and has caught the attention of the faculty.*

Another participant indicated:

> *Yeah, I think one of the really obvious and not very interesting things that probably everyone you ask this question is gonna' say, but it's true until you start detecting a pattern there—is that you have to lead by example. If you ask for data, if you ask questions, if you probe and analyze the data, publicly…We would have the leaders of that effort come to particular meetings. If it's the president's A-team, or if it's college counsel, or whatever, and discuss the latest report, and have everyone tear it apart, and just really take ownership of understanding the data that are being presented. Just by asking for that, and scheduling time on the meeting agenda for that. That signals that it's a priority.*

A final comment from a participant illustrates that changing behavior takes time and leaders can do a lot to reinforce positive change:

> *I feel fortunate, when I got here, my predecessor had set this up very well, so everybody, essentially, is operating under expectation that we're not assessing enough. We're not assessing the right way; we're not doing enough assessment. I think that's national. I didn't have to convince everyone in instruction, of the value of that. They have been working on this for years, and they have built their own networks, and their own jargon, even. They've developed their own subcultures of assessment, so really my challenge has been kind of harnessing that, and getting it out of the feedback loop, where they're just sort of spinning their wheels and actually moving towards advancing the institution.*

This participant further clarified that while the organization had established practices related to measuring the impact of actions, they still needed to improve how they use the information to make positive changes.

The other theme described by respondents was related to **resources.** According to responses, leaders demonstrate the importance of evaluation activities by supporting training and development and by using data to make other budgetary decisions. Examples demonstrating this include the following:

> *The leadership provides resources (stipends, catering) for participation in assessment events. Also, announcements and invitations to assessment events come from the provost's office to emphasize the fact that she places value in these events.*

The result of this according to the participant was:

The impact has been that participation has been quite good in assessment events.

In the following comment, the participant indicates that leaders demonstrate the importance of measuring performance and using data to make decisions in the following ways:

> *Budgetary decisions; initiating new programs, phasing out of existing due to enrollments; showing that student retention, and full-time status, for example, impacts health of institutional budget.*

Another participant indicated the following:

> *We ask instructors, during their course assessments, if the suggested change they would like to make to improve student learning involved a budgetary item. They quickly understand that requesting more equipment/supplies needs to come from a need to improve students learning. Light bulb comes on pretty quickly when talking money.*

Additionally, several responses from participants seemed to indicate a more passive approach from leaders as it relates to demonstrating the importance of closing the loop. Examples included:

> *They have tried to share the results in all college meetings.*
>
> *It is regularly mentioned in meetings and college wide committees.*
>
> *This is still opaque for us; I'm hoping recent leadership changes will help.*

Finally, a noteworthy response indicated that leaders demonstrate the importance of evaluation through "… negotiations and contract language." The respondent indicated that the result of this was "resistance and resentment."

In the next section, the second research question is addressed. Qualities and characteristics of organizations that promote a culture and practice of evaluation were identified through the strategies and results of strategies described by participants in the section above.

Research Question Two – Results of Qualities and Characteristics

In high performing public community colleges, what qualities and characteristics of the organization promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?

Based upon the responses that elaborated on strategies, best practices, deficiencies and gaps, the qualities and characteristics of an organization that promote a culture and practice of evaluation include, in the order emphasis, the following (1) an organization that establishes and maintains a structure and process for evaluation activities, (2) an organization that supports employees in the practice of evaluation, (3) an organization that talks about evaluation practice, and carefully frames evaluation outcomes, and finally (4) an organization in which leaders demonstrate interest and engagement in evaluation.

Results of qualities and characteristics – Number One: An organization that establishes and maintains a structure and process for evaluation activities promotes a culture and practice of evaluation. Participants most often described that strategies that promoted evaluation practice and culture were those that made evaluation a part of what employees do. It was clear in participant responses that the better established a process or system was for organizing the way performance improvement initiatives take place, the more likely evaluation of those initiatives would take place and be positively received. In doing this, these strategies helped employees spend less time speculating about what is needed when evaluating results, what is expected, how to do evaluation, how much time activities would take, how to report and use results, whether evaluation is valuable or not, and how they would align evaluation with their other duties. The following survey and interview excerpts help clarify some of these aspects:

Knowing what is expected:

When it happens, it is built into the plan from the beginning, and it usually has a champion…

The strategies that work are those which faculty/staff will actually implement and follow-through on. So providing a clear, simpl[e] reporting methodology is key.

New initiatives are discussed with the IE Office to establish how and when we will measure the impact of the initiative.

Establishing measures prior to implementation of new projects; ensuring that systems are able to collect needed data is the best strategy.

Making one person responsible improves chances of follow-through.

An intentional focus on outcomes evaluation as part of the design process rather than after implementation seems to help.

Setting expectation that new initiatives have to be measured. Identify measures in advance. Also, give people access to data.

Reporting out and accountability:

For student success initiatives, we have committee whose role is to provide oversight and evaluation of initiatives. The Dean of Student Success follows up on retention plans to work with faculty to analyze success of the plan. Program outcome assessment is followed up by the Dean of Academics office. Reinforcing this point, one respondent indicated 'When it happens, it is built into the plan from the beginning, and it usually has a champion'.

The leadership follow-up is probably the most important. If projects just fade away and don't receive follow-up attention, there is little motivation or incentive to devote time to evaluations. We could do better at this, but new leadership is still establishing itself.

…We report to the Board of Trustees monthly on the results of a segment of the scorecard so that there is accountability for continuous improvement.

Regular report-outs in formal settings; goal tracking within an area.

…Most of our metrics roll up in some way to an institutional scorecard which documents our overall effectiveness. In this way we can see the impact of small and comprehensive interventions.

Outcomes of process have value:

Building closing the loop into the processes reinforces the culture.

Some initiatives and strategies are discontinued, and some are continued.

Results qualities and characteristics – Number Two: An organization that supports employees in the practice of evaluation promotes a culture and practice of evaluation. The next most emphasized theme indicated that an organization that provides support to employees in the practice of evaluation is most likely to succeed in engaging and motivating employees successfully in evaluation practice. Participants emphasized the need to help employees understand how to evaluate performance, and how to use information to inform progress. This was often described as employees helping one another, employees provided with professional development and training, and professional assessment staff support.

Participants were asked two questions about support in evaluation activities present at their own institution. The first question "Are there any employees at the college responsible for helping employees with evaluation activities (helping to develop evaluation methods and tools, gathering evaluation information, helping to analyze outcome information, etc.)? was answered by eleven participants and all of them said "yes". The second question asked, "Is anyone at the college specifically tasked with overseeing follow-up evaluation and ensuring that outcomes or impacts of initiatives are measured?" Nine participants responded but only six indicated that anyone is specifically tasked with overseeing follow-up evaluation activities.

Participants indicated the importance of acknowledging that if evaluation is not already so culturally embedded in the work of the institution, employees see it as an added burden to their already busy workload. Acknowledging this through processes that made closing the loop activities more seamless were valued. The following survey and interview excerpts help clarify some of these aspects:

Personal support:

> *Pairing new employees with evaluation responsibilities with seasoned employees with positive evaluation behaviors.*
>
> *Cordial and timely meetings with the evaluation staff.*
>
> *Individualized meeting and training can be effective to convince employees that they are the one who will use the results for their improvements. Understanding their needs such as program accreditation is critical to build up relationship with participants.*
>
> *The PIER office [Planning, Institutional Effectiveness, and Research Office] holds meetings with individual departments to discuss their annual goals and measures and guide them through the reporting process because they find the process intimidating and we relieve their fears.*

Acknowledging busy workloads:

> *The most effective strategy is this: minimize the impact on their normal workflow. This means collecting data through passive means if at all possible. In addition, have a face-to-face meeting to discuss outcomes where you provide positive reinforcement to their efforts.*
>
> *I don't think you have to measure everything, you can't measure everything, you can connect efforts to larger measures.*
> *Sometimes people make it really complicated, they can make it simpler and still get focused on results. People in IR don't always talk the language that helps people understand. If people don't understand, they don't have the time to try to tackle measuring. Having the right people work on this throughout the college is key.*
>
> *…I emphasize that my goal is to have the smallest possible impact on the normal faculty workflow while still collecting the assessment data we need. Faculty are sometimes quick to imagine that I am asking them to take time away from their students, and I have to demonstrate that assessment and closing the loop do not have to take inordinate amounts of faculty time.*

Make systems easy to access:

> *Up until recently, we struggled with keeping the data organized enough to actually go back and report changes we made.*
>
> *The strategies that work are those which faculty/staff will actually implement and follow-through on. So providing a clear, simpl[e] reporting methodology is key.*

Results qualities and characteristics – Number Three: An organization that talks about evaluation practice and carefully frames evaluation outcomes promotes a culture and practice of evaluation. The next most emphasized theme indicated that an organization that spends time and effort talking about closing the loop and reinforcing the importance of evaluation, and also framing it positively is more likely to successfully promote a culture and practice of evaluation. Participants described the importance of reinforcing a message that made evaluation results less personal and more focused on the mission. Additionally, not taking into account the impact of fear of results makes a negative impact on motivation and engagement. The following survey and interview excerpts help clarify some of these aspects:

Focus on the higher purpose:

> *Keeping the focus on the social justice mission of our institution. It's about students, and not about the performance of individuals or departments. We are here to improve, so let's focus on it and not blame for what has been or is. We need creativity from every person and you can't have that if you mire in guilt or embarrassment.*
>
> *Repeated emphasis that evaluation helps employees to serve students better. Everyone is interested in doing what is in the best interest of the students, so framing it as a service to students is key. The respondent indicated that the result of this emphasis is a broader adoption of the data-informed mindset.*
>
> *Cultural change takes time, but we are getting there. Hiring new faculty into the culture has helped as much as changing the current mindset. More and more faculty and staff are using data and asking for data. We begin almost every project now with a deep look at data and evidence.*

Stay positive about the practice of evaluation and those on board:

Rewarding that practice through positive verbal recognition.

These strategies [training and development] are very effective because employees know this practice is not punitive.

Fear of 'negative results' is still common among faculty because the assessment process is still under development and they haven't experienced the process of viewing results constructively. However, faculty and staff talk to each other, and there are some instances where staff have explained to faculty that 'negative results' are nothing to fear.

This strategy [training and development] facilitates good habits and a positive state of mind towards evaluation.

Faculty are willing to take risks knowing they have leadership support to do so. We have become less afraid of asking hard questions.

Results qualities and characteristics – Number Four: An organization in which leaders demonstrate interest and engagement in evaluation promotes a culture and practice of evaluation. Finally, participants indicated that an organization in which leaders engage in actions that demonstrate that closing the loop is important is more likely to promote a culture and practice of evaluation. Participants described the importance of leaders reinforcing the message that seeking information about and using results is important. This message is communicated through participation in data sharing events and conversations, acknowledging the efforts of those who engage in evaluation activities, and financially supporting efforts to develop the capacity of employees to engage in evaluation activities. The following survey and interview excerpts help clarify some of these aspects:

Leaders talk and ask about results:

The senior leadership team reinforces the importance of this every single time, and leads by example.

The leadership follow-up is probably the most important. If projects just fade away and don't receive follow-up attention, there is little motivation or incentive to devote *time to evaluations. We could do better at this, but new leadership is still establishing itself.*

Leaders are supportive and show up:

Faculty are willing to take risks knowing they have leadership support to do so. We have become less afraid of asking hard questions.

Generally, if leadership is invested in the strategy, it gets evaluated for effectiveness.

We would have the leaders of that effort come to particular meetings. If it's the president's A-team, or if it's college counsel, or whatever, and discuss the latest report, and have everyone tear it apart, and just really take ownership of understanding the data that are being presented. Just by asking for that, and scheduling time on the meeting agenda for that. That signals that it's a priority.

Leaders allocate resources:

Leaders support professional development of staff and faculty to learn how to use evidence (assessment workshops, student success academy, webinars, etc.)

The leadership provides resources (stipends, catering) for participation in assessment events.

Chapter Summary

Participants in this study provided insight into the strategies used in their organizations that promote a culture and practice of evaluation. Participants responded to questions about strategies that promote evaluation practice, encourage engagement of employees in evaluation, promote accountability, strategies that decrease fear of evaluation, and a final question about the role of leaders in promoting a practice of closing the loop.

Strategies that promoted participation and engagement in evaluation activities included making evaluation easy to do and to able to fit into other workload, supporting employees through partnerships and training as they grow competent in evaluation, establishing processes in which closing the loop activities are systematic and expectations are clear. Additionally, continually talking about evaluation, the importance of evaluation, and its relationship to the achieving the mission of the organization was viewed as an important strategy for promoting a closing the loop culture. Finally, strategies that place leadership engagement in evaluation activities promoted engagement and accountability in evaluation activities. This included leadership support in providing resources to train and develop employees and leadership talking about and asking for results of performance initiatives.

Participants also described elements that negatively impact progress in building and maintaining a culture and practice of closing the loop. Those elements included lack of leadership engagement, lack of leadership insights on what motivates employees, and lack of continuity as leaders turn over. Additionally, participants identified the need for processes to be easy for employees, including making data organized and available, setting expectations and standards up front, and training and supporting employees in evaluation activities.

Based upon the strategies and results of strategies as described by participants, prominent **qualities and characteristics** of organizations that promote evaluation culture focus on processes, support, communication, and leadership engagement. These characteristics are listed in order of emphasis by participants. The following paragraphs briefly summarize these qualities and characteristics.

Organizations that establish set **processes and structures** to ensure that initiatives are measured, and results are reviewed, help to promote a culture and practice of evaluation. Establishing processes and protocols helps clarify to employee expectations and levels of accountability.

Organizations that **support** employees in the practice of evaluation promote a culture and practice of evaluation. This includes providing employees with personal support as they work through evaluation activities, making systems easy to understand and navigate, and acknowledging the busy workloads of employees.

Organizations that **communicate and talk** about evaluation promote a culture and practice of evaluation. Participants described many strategies that enable the organization to keep evaluation in the conversation and out front for employees. Also, framing evaluation positively promotes employee engagement and diminishes fear of talking about the results of employee efforts. Communication about evaluation placed in a positive light may help employees to focus on the higher purposes of evaluation such as the mission of the organization and student learning, rather than the focus on results that reveal unsuccessful efforts of employees. These organizations will promote engagement in evaluation through accolades that honor participation, not results necessarily.

As the final quality and characteristic identified through participant responses, an organization in which **leaders demonstrate interest and engagement** in evaluation promotes a culture and practice of evaluation. This includes behaviors from leaders such as asking about results, talking about results, supporting events in which results are shared by showing up, and by allocating resources that support evaluation activities. Resources that promote evaluation practice and competence include training, professional development, events celebrating results, and acknowledgements for evaluation activities.

The following chapter provides a discussion and summary of the essential findings of this study as well as the relevant connections to literature and professional applications.

Chapter V– Discussion and Conclusion

Background and Purpose

The present qualitative research study focused on the issues surrounding the lack of evaluation in organizations of higher education. This research was conducted to gain insight into strategies that promote a culture of evaluation or "closing the loop" as it relates to performance of programs and initiatives in public community colleges. Additionally, this study seeks to identify elements of culture that contribute to promoting evaluation practice. Evaluation for this study refers to activities, actions, and protocols that lead to measuring the performance of organizational efforts, processes, or initiatives. The term "closing the loop" is commonly used in performance improvement language and refers to following-up to determine if intended outcomes were achieved (see Figure 5.1.). Figure 5.1 illustrates the circular continuous nature of performance improvement and the portion in red highlights the role of evaluation. This circular process begins with assessing the need for improvement, and then planning and implementing an intervention intended to achieve an improvement. Evaluation is then systematically performed to ensure that the intervention results in the intended outcome. Finally, integration occurs when the improvement becomes a normal part of business. The cycle can begin again whenever improvements are needed.

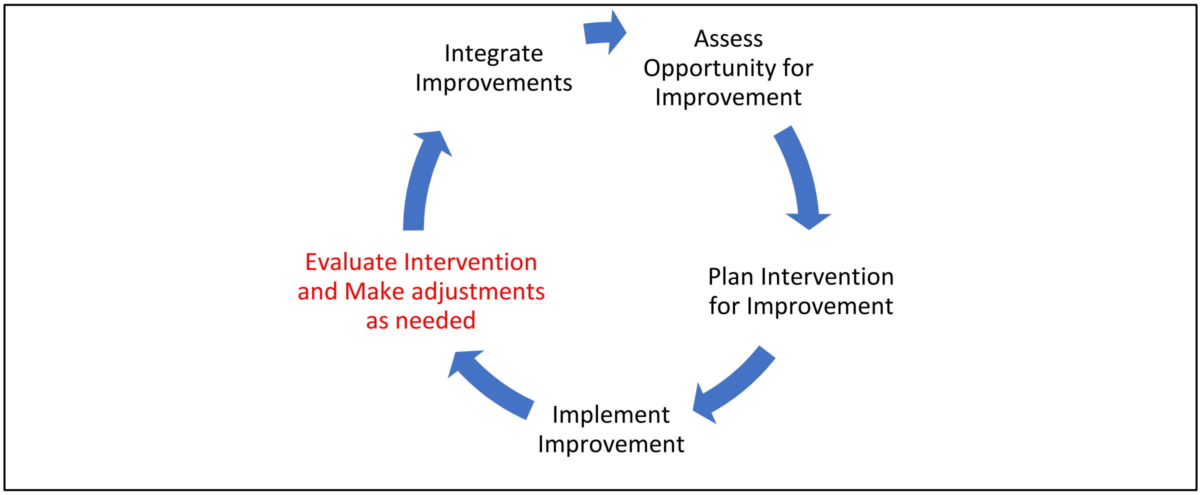

Figure 5.1. Closing the Loop Diagram: Central New Mexico Community College (2011)

This study began with the assumption that evaluation and closing the loop to determine if initiatives and efforts succeed in their intended outcomes, was valuable. Literature supported the assumption that evaluation promotes 1) the opportunity for a discussion about the core value of what an organization does (Preskill & Torres, 1999b), and 2) organizational learning which is a process of identifying problems and correcting them (Argyris, 1977).

This study also began by understanding that community colleges could improve their practice and capacity to evaluate and understand the impact of their improvement initiatives. Similarly, research of Morest and Jenkins (2007) suggested that community colleges do not evaluate the impact of their programs routinely and when they do, they often do not use the results to make improvements in their approaches. In his research on community college effectiveness, Tinto (2012) suggested that despite years of working to develop effectiveness measures, community colleges still struggle to develop a coherent framework that represents which actions matter the most, and how they are best implemented. He argued that, "the result is an uncoordinated patchwork of actions whose sum impact on student retention is less than it could or should be" (p. 121). Supporting Tinto's finding, one participant in the present study indicated:

> *While gains in retention, course completion, and numbers of graduates can arguably have been influenced by the variety of interventions/initiatives we have tried over the last three years, the glut of effort precludes any specific attribution of effect.*

Similarly, McMurtrie (2008), in an article related to community colleges taking on global challenges, cited that, "measuring success is one of community college leaders "trickiest subjects" (p. 40). Finally, in their text "*Creating a Data-Informed Culture in Community Colleges"*, authors Phillips and Horowitz (2017) indicate that in addition to community colleges receiving national attention, there are important national initiatives and opportunities to improve community colleges. They suggests that community colleges have an enormous amount of data but lack good strategies that support end-users in effectively using information to drive success, institutionally or from a student-success perspective.

Patton (2008) described evaluation as a complex process that involved navigating organizational and individual dynamics, often with an involved system of stakeholders. Therefore, areas in the study questionnaire were informed with the perspective that evaluation activities are influenced by many factors including fear of evaluation results, lack of insight into how to evaluate, concern about how much time evaluation activities take, and engagement of employees in evaluation activities (Bradley, 2004; Preskill & Torres, 1999a; Rebolloso et al., 2005; Whitehall, Hill, & Koehler, 2012).

Research Questions

The following were the two central questions of this study:

1. In high performing public community colleges, what **strategies** promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?
2. In high performing public community colleges, what **qualities and characteristics** of the organization promote a culture and practice of evaluation of the impact and performance of programs or initiatives?

Participant Response

Twenty-six (26) participants opened the survey, however only twelve (12) of the 34 community college representatives fully completed the survey. While twelve participants fully completed the survey, twenty (20) participants completed some portion of the survey. Nonresponse bias as well as item nonresponse bias was considered and described in the previous chapter.

Discussion

The following describes six findings from this study. The results of the survey and interviews of participants in this study inform the discussion.

Finding Number One: Establish and maintain a structure and process for evaluation activities. Based on the responses from participants as they described strategies and results of strategies that promote a culture and practice of evaluation, the study identified how organizations that establish set **processes and structures** to ensure that initiatives are measured and results reviewed, help to promote a culture and practice of evaluation. Establishing processes and protocols helps clarify expectations and levels of accountability to employees.

In describing strategies, participants indicated that having a structure in place as it relates to protocols and responsibilities to track performance of initiatives helps decrease ambiguity, helps employees understand what is expected, and helps reinforce accountability. Consequently, employees are more aware of the value of evaluation. This is consistent with Taylor (2005) as she described culture and change in organizations. She indicated that behaviors, symbols, and systems were the primary communication mechanisms in organizations, and that changes intended to alter culture should consider attention to the impact of these mechanisms. Having systems in processes in place helps clarify to employees what is valued and how to do what is valued. Additionally, Morest and Jenkins (2007) indicate the importance of institutionalizing processes that support building a culture of evidence at community colleges. They suggest "The process of building a culture of evidence requires the broad engagement of administrators, faculty, and student services staff in using data to understand where their students are experiencing problems, designing strategies for remedying those problems, and then evaluating the effectiveness of solutions implemented. It also involves institutionalizing the use of data analysis as the basis for program review, strategic planning, and budgeting" (p. 4).

Senge (2006) suggests that as an organization learns, it gains from the benefits of appropriate policies, structures, strategies, and then continuously evaluating policies, structures, and strategies to understand how well these elements work. Similarly, Denison & Mishra (1989) indicate the ability to adapt effectively requires the organization to think about change as a process and that organizations need to have processes in place that facilitate and enable change. Participants indicated the advantage of implementing processes and systems that establish guidance to employees in conducting evaluation activities. This is seen in the following comments from participants as they illustrate the impact that processes and systems have on the likelihood that initiatives will be measured:

> *Up until recently, we struggled with keeping the data organized enough to actually go back and report changes we made.*
>
> *The strategies that work are those which faculty/staff will actually implement and follow-through on. So providing a clear, simpl[e] reporting methodology is key.*

With organizational structures in place, employees understand what is **expected**. Reinforcing this point, participants described the need to have a plan in place from the beginning when kicking off a new initiative and that the plan would include measures and clarity related to the person most responsible. In a study of strategies building evaluation capacity in health clinics, researchers found that the presence of organizational tools and infrastructure promoted evaluation capacity building, (Bourgeois, Simmons, & Buetti, 2018).

As described earlier, Denison and Mishra (1989) studied organizational culture as it related to and impacted organizational effectiveness. In their theory identifying elements of organizational culture and effectiveness, they described the quality of consistency and the positive impact that a strong culture with shared values and beliefs has on the ability of an organization to effectively reach consensus and implement coordinated activities. As described earlier, when organizations implement a process for evaluating initiatives, they are communicating that they value closing the loop. Denison and Mishra (1989) also describe the element of "adaptability" indicating that effective organizations have strategies in place that help them adapt to changing needs and requirements. A system in place that helps organizations understand what is working and what is not, promotes effective decision-making and the ability to adapt to new priorities. The following participant comments highlight this value and the perceived advantage that evaluation processes have on the ability of the organization to use information to inform decisions and adapt to change:

> *Switching gears when interventions don't work the way it was anticipated; STOP DOING THINGS THAT AREN'T WORKING.*
>
> *A focus on thinking through initiatives and an understanding that they are works in progress and may not be institutionalized.*
>
> *This organization recognized that all projects to do not meet the set objectives. As projects evolve changes are implemented and adjusted. Continuous evaluation and making recommendations/changes are valued.*
>
> *Some initiatives and strategies are discontinued, and some are continued.*

This first finding represents the most common theme related to the responses from participants as they describe strategies that promote the practice of evaluation. The second most common theme focused on the need to support employees in evaluation activities.

Finding Number Two: Support employees in the practice of evaluation. As the next most emphasized theme, participant comments indicated that an organization that provides support to employees in the practice of evaluation is most likely to succeed in engaging employees successfully in evaluation practice. Participants emphasized the need to help employees understand how to evaluate performance and how to use information to inform progress. These support strategies were often described as employees helping one another, employees being provided with professional development and training, and the availability of professional assessment staff support (people who help people with evaluation methods and employees who assist with clerical tasks, as an example). Additionally, participants indicated the importance of acknowledging that employees see activities associated with closing the loop as an added burden to their already busy workload. Perceiving evaluation activities as an added burden might be most common in those organizations where evaluation practice is not already a common practice and not communicated or practices as a fundamental part of effective organizational functioning. Acknowledging the perception through processes that made closing the loop activities easier and more seamless were valued. This includes helping employees do evaluation work. Participants described the importance of personal support as in the following comments:

> *Pairing new employees with evaluation responsibilities with seasoned employees with positive evaluation behaviors.*
>
> *Cordial and timely meetings with the evaluation staff.*

Supporting the notion that personal support and attention to how people may struggle with evaluation activities, Greene (2001) discussed the relationship aspects of evaluation such as the focus on the way people interact in a certain environment. He indicated attention to relationships promotes respect for moral, political, and ethical elements in the environment. Similarly, Taut and Brauns (2003) also described barriers and resistance to evaluation, to include organizational resistance to change and psychological factors.

In their theory of Organizational Learning and Effectiveness, Denison and Mishra (1989) described the element of "involvement." They suggested that higher levels of participation and involvement created a sense of responsibility and ownership in organization members. As described earlier in the results of the question that asked participants about the assistance available to employees who engage in evaluation activities, all participants indicated that at least one person at their institution was responsible for helping employees with evaluation activities. Similarly, in her study of building a culture of evidence in the community college, Grodzicki (2014) found that although the institution was committed to collecting, analyzing, and reporting data about performance, the lack of capability of the institutional research office deterred the institution from routinely using data to inform institutional decisions. The following participant comments help illustrate the importance of effective support from institutional research or other employees:

> *Sometimes people make it really complicated, they can make it simpler and still get focused on results. People in IR [Institutional Research] don't always talk the language that helps people understand. If people don't understand, they don't have the time to try to tackle measuring. Having the right people work on this throughout the college is key.*

> *Individualized meeting and training can be effective to convince employees that they are the one who will use the results for their improvements. Understanding their needs such as program accreditation is critical to build up relationship with participants.*

> *Including someone from Planning and Assessment in the initial planning stages of the initiative strengthens the ability to measure the initiative's impact and how well the outcomes are met.*

Factors that contribute to the lack of participation in evaluation are many, including the notion that checking on the results of initiatives takes significant effort and is burdensome (Katz et al., 2002). Included in this second finding, participants described that employees struggle with evaluation activities because of the added burden to an already **busy workload**. This may be particularly true in organizations where there does not already exist a strong cultural and practical requirement to evaluate and close the loop when introducing new initiatives. Additionally, people tasked with evaluation feel that their evaluation activities are burdensome to other employees who are needed in the evaluation process and that this takes time away from program work (Whitehall, Hill, & Koehler, 2012).

Finally, Shadle, Marker, and Earle (2017) studied barriers to change and suggested that it was important to learn about the barriers to implementing change in organizations. They described particularly barriers to faculty participation in evaluation and assessment activities relate to inadequate resources and time constraints. The following participant responses illustrate related sentiments:

> *The most effective strategy is this: minimize the impact on their normal workflow. This means collecting data through passive means if at all possible. In addition, have a face-to-face meeting to discuss outcomes where you provide positive reinforcement to their efforts.*
>
> *Automating the collection of the data (using our forms) also helps faculty spend less time collecting the data and more time analyzing, planning and evaluating the changes.*
>
> *I don't think you have to measure everything, you can't measure everything, you can connect efforts to larger measures.*
>
> *They (multiple initiatives) were kind of really very taxing on the institution. We struggle with that now a little bit ourselves here. I think that in Achieving the Dream, and now we're doing the Guided Pathways with really no outside support…*

This is consistent with Dormant (1999) discussion of successful implementations of change that included the elements of simplicity and compatibility. He suggests that people are more likely to accept and adopt change if it is easy to understand and compatible with past activities as well as compatible with the values and beliefs of those involved. The following participant comment illustrates this sentiment:

> *The PIER [Planning, Institutional Effectiveness, and Research] office holds meetings with individual departments to discuss their annual goals and measures and guide them through the reporting process because they find the process intimidating and we relieve their fears.*

This second finding helps to clarify the importance that organizations place on support systems that are likely to ensure employee engagement in evaluation activities as well as help employees feel successful in their journey to understand the results of institutional efforts. The next most emphasized theme and third finding focused on how community colleges talk about evaluation and communicate the value of evaluation.

Finding Number Three: Talk about evaluation practice and thoughtfully frames evaluation outcomes. Participant comments indicted that an organization that **communicates and talks** about evaluation, promotes a culture and practice of evaluation.

This includes keeping evaluation in the college conversation and out front for employees. Participant comments suggest that **framing evaluation positively** promotes engagement and diminishes fear of talking about the results of employee efforts because positivity comes from engaging in the evaluation itself and celebrating learning what is working and what is not. Consistent with this, Jenkins (2011) indicates that "…college leaders should set clear, measurable goals for improving student outcomes and emphasize them in communications with faculty, staff, trustees, and others, presenting data on the college's performance on the measures and highlighting areas for improvement whenever possible" (p. 31).

Participant comments illustrated that a positive approach to communicating and talking about evaluation and evaluation results decreases fear of engagement. This also reinforces the value of an Appreciative Inquiry approach (Coghlan et al., 2003). As described earlier, an Appreciative Inquiry approach enables the focus to remain on what is working and the possibilities of expanding upon what is working rather than focus on deficits. The following comments illustrate the impact that fear of results has and the importance of paying attention to it:

> *Faculty are willing to take risks knowing they have leadership support to do so. We have become less afraid of asking hard questions.*
>
> *Fear of 'negative results' is still common among faculty because the assessment process is still under development and they haven't experienced the process of viewing results constructively. However, faculty and staff talk to each other, and there are some instances where staff have explained to faculty that 'negative results' are nothing to fear.*

Communication about evaluation placed in a positive light may help employees to focus on the **higher purposes of evaluation** such as the mission of the organization and student learning, rather than the focus on results that reveal unsuccessful efforts.

Organizations will promote engagement in evaluation through accolades that honor participation, not necessarily results. The following participant comment illustrates this:

> *Keeping the focus on the social justice mission of our institution. It's about students, and not about the performance of individuals or departments. We are here to improve, so let's focus on it and not blame for what has been or is. We need creativity from every person, and you can't have that if you mired in guilt or embarrassment.*

Comments from participants validated the importance of the element "valence" described by Vroom (1964) in his motivation theory. Vroom described valence as the concept of personal value and emphasized that employees are motivated to act based upon what they value. Participants in this study emphasized the importance of evaluation that is driven by a higher purpose such as organizational mission, student success, and personal achievement of the employee. Some participant comments specifically indicated that rewards would not be seen as valuable and that value comes from achieving the positive results they intended. Similarly, Binder (2009) indicates "People are generally happy when they see how their work contributes to the organization's success and have the means for achieving success and continuing to develop themselves" (p. 9).

Participants described employee engagement in evaluation that supports the mission of the institution and see initiatives make a difference. This is consistent with Denison and Mishra's Organization Culture and Effectiveness Theory (1989). They suggested one of the elements that impact organizational effectiveness is the ability for employees to align work with the organizational mission. Participant comments illustrate the value of this perspective:

> *Our college's culture is very results-oriented, so anyone who can demonstrably improve a process or system, ESPECIALLY if the impact on students is direct, is hailed as a hero.*

Keep the focus on students; reward all changes, even if small; help faculty and staff understand the data and the social justice mission in evaluating it and planning next steps.

Repeated emphasis that evaluation helps employees to serve students better. Everyone is interested in doing what is in the best interest of the students, so framing it as a service to students is key.

Our faculty and staff are motivated by student success. When our students succeed, we all succeed.

Vroom (1964) also suggested that value is relative and what one person values, another may not. Additionally, he cautioned that leaders should have insight in the potential difference between what they as leaders value compared to what other employees' value.

This third finding illustrates the importance of strategies and practices that communicate the importance of engaging in the closing the loop behavior and not placing focus on individual performance. Communication that normalizes that some initiatives work and some don't may promote greater engagement and ultimately promote trust with employees. The next most emphasized theme in the responses of participants appears next as finding four. This fourth finding illustrates the importance of leadership engagement in the promotion of evaluation practice.

Finding Number Four: Leaders demonstrate interest and engagement in evaluation. The fourth finding in this study focuses on leaders. In the study results, participants focused less on this element of building evaluation practice but still identified it as important; suggesting that an organization in which **leaders demonstrate interest and engagement** in evaluation promotes a culture and practice of evaluation. Participants described that leaders communicate the importance of evaluation when they ask about results, talk about results, show up to relevant events, and allocate resources that support evaluation activities. The following comment reinforces this:

> *We have seen our capacity to use information for evaluation and decision-making grow significantly. We have more and more managers and deans asking for and using data to guide their decisions and evaluate their programs.*

Similarly, Jenkins (2011) describes the importance of leadership communication and engagement, "…policymakers and college leaders should seek to communicate a compelling vision for change and educate key stakeholders on the goals of reform and the strategies by which they will be met" (p. 31).

Resources that promote evaluation practice and competence include training, professional development, events celebrating results, and acknowledgements for evaluation activities. Schein (1985) also argued that the primary function of leadership was to develop and evolve the culture that promoted the best outcomes and results of the organization. Similarly, Senge (1990) argues that "superior performance depends on superior learning" (p.7) and that leaders are responsible for building organizations in which people are continually expanding and growing to their more complete potential. Finally, Edmondson (2012) describes the importance of leadership in setting the cultural stage that allows an open exchange about performance, even failure. The next comment illustrates the importance of leadership as an element of building evaluation culture:

> *We're really trying to affect a culture change here, and the leadership previously was fairly top down in its management style. That's not the president's style, and it's not my style. By engaging people in this kind of assessment work, where they live, we think we're getting a lot of traction, and we're actually seeing some of the culture change that we set out to accomplish.*

Participant comments illustrate that leaders make an impact on the culture of trust. Mellow and Heelan (2014) describe the importance of capability to build trust among faculty and staff and suggest that "leaders must create an environment where people feel safe to speak from their hearts" (p. 143). Similarly, Senge (1990) describes that inept leaders can cause emotional and spiritual harm. As illustrated above, faculty feel less afraid to engage in evaluation when they know they have support of leaders.

Finding Number Five: Lack of reference to accountability strategies. The lack of reference to accountability either in general or in specific strategies was notable in the results of this study. In a review of participant responses of the eleven questions in the survey, participants use the term accountability only four times. Furthermore, participants refer to accountability by citing passive strategies such as reference to Job Descriptions that mention evaluation as a duty, and accreditation requirements or grant reporting. For example, the survey included the question “What do you think is the most effective strategy or strategies used in your organization to engage employees in evaluation activities?” In response, one participant indicated, “Leveraging things like mandates from accrediting bodies.”

The following participant response suggests that follow-through on evaluation takes place only when the conditions are right:

Making one person responsible improves chance of follow-through.

The topic of accountability relates to the element of Argyris' work focused on how defensiveness impacts organizational behavior and ultimately organizational results. As described earlier, Argyris (1995) identified defensive routines as those that result in an organization that is not willing to confront performance problems and work to protect individuals and the organization. These routines prevent organizations from embracing mistakes and errors and making needed corrections. Argyris (2002) further indicates that "organizational defensive routines are any action, policy or practice that prevents organizational participants from experiencing embarrassment or threat and, at the same time, prevents them from discovering the causes of the embarrassment or threat" (p. 213). The discomfort felt by leaders in holding employees accountable, such as following up with employees who have not submitted a plan for how and when they will measure the impact of their initiative, illustrates an element of Argyris' concepts. He argued that, "defenses are more dangerous to the long-run health of the organization because first they distort the truth in the name of helping others" (Argyris, 1985, p. 7).

While research indicates that evaluation driven by compliance and accountability may under-represent the value of evaluation and discourage employee engagement (Chelimsky, 1997; Hanwright & Makinson, 2008), mechanisms ensuring accountability for evaluation minimizes the possibility of leaving to chance follow-up and measurement of impacts of initiatives. The following participant comment from a telephone interview conveyed a desire to move away from holding employees accountable:

> *This one maybe - I might be an outlier on this, among all the people that you're interviewing, 'cuz I have kind of a non-traditional view of this, I think. I think that what distinguishes a competent leader from an excellent leader is that the excellent leader is able to inspire and harness discretionary effort among the people that he or she leads. I think that that's true of an institution as well. I think at this college, too much accountability, too much of a heavy hand seeking to hold people accountable, would actually be counterproductive. I think our culture is that the people hold themselves accountable to the students, and that gives them a sense of higher purpose. They don't have their boss telling them, do this or you're gonna' be in trouble. They have this imaginary student group whispering in their ear, help us, help us, help us more. Why can't you do this, think different or better? That's way better than any sort of external accountability that we could employ.*

Researchers Frink and Klimosky (1998) describe accountability as one of the most fundamental elements of organizational performance and outcomes. They further suggested that accountability is not well studied or understood. Similarly, Hall, Blass, Ferris, and Massengale (2004) indicate that "accountability is one of the foundational elements of organizations, yet theory and research in this area, as it applies to behavior in organizations, has lagged behind, despite some widely publicized problem areas." Further, "accountability has valuable organizational outcomes, such as performance precision, and focus" (Thoms, Dose & Scott, 2002, p. 309). Additionally, understanding how leaders see the use of accountability strategies to impact organizational outcomes would be useful.

While addressing the advantage of infrastructure and processes related to submitting plans up front and reporting results regularly, one respondent indicates:

> *This strategy seems to be working for our institution. We are holding projects/initiatives accountable and actually completing projects.*

Finally, the following comment about leadership follow-up indicates the importance placed on leaders who follow-up and therefore reinforce accountability, but the comment also seems to indicate that the follow-up may or may not happen:

> *The leadership follow-up is probably the most important. If projects just fade away and don't receive follow-up attention, there is little motivation or incentive to devote time to evaluations. We could do better at this, but new leadership is still establishing itself.*

In the present study, accountability was included in the questionnaire to understand to what extent high-performing community colleges engaged in specific strategies to support and promote accountability. A few participants described concrete accountability strategies; however most responses revealed a lack of specific strategies.

Finding Number Six: Lack of leadership engagement strategies. Review of participant responses focused on reference to leadership indicates that, while participants described the importance of leadership engagement, participants largely failed to describe actual strategies highlighting reference to leadership. This deficit is seen in the following example; participants were asked to "Please describe any strategies your organization uses to reinforce the practice of closing the loop (going back to check on initiatives) to ensure that new initiatives achieve their intended outcomes?" The responses reveal that only four out of seventeen responses included any reference to senior leaders, executive leaders, or any leadership level at all. This was surprising when answering a question about strategies used to reinforce the culture of closing the loop.

As described earlier, Preskill and Torres (1999b) indicate that in learning organizations, leaders are everywhere, and at all levels of the organization. They also emphasize that upper level leader indifference to learning about performance and outcomes will not sustain evaluative inquiry and organizational learning. Finally, some comments from participants conveyed passive leadership approaches, such as the following:

They have tried to share the results in all college meetings.

The lack of reference to strategies regarding the role of leaders in evaluation was seen in the results when participants were asked to identify the **best strategy** used in their organization to reinforce the practice of closing the loop. Only one of sixteen comments referenced the role of leaders in the "best strategy" to reinforce the practice of closing the loop. This may illustrate that participants do not currently integrate strategies that include leadership presence.

Finally, leaders must be committed to the goals of the organization and to the practice of learning (Senge, 2006). In doing this, leaders promote a culture of trust in which failures are part of learning and improving (Goh & Richards, 1997). One notable response to the question regarding strategies that reduce fear and intimidation of evaluation suggested that:

Leadership does not seem to make this consideration.

Limitations

The survey questions were framed with an Appreciative Inquiry lens in order to promote participation and to provide insight into what is working well in high-performing community colleges. Participants provided information consistent with this approach. However, insight into the broader contexts of organizational performance would be beneficial. This includes understanding what isn't working well. The present study focused on best practices and best strategies and the results of these best practices. A broader understanding of what isn't working in a high-performing institution (such as those recognized by the Aspen Institute) would improve context and applicability.

Implications for Practice

Leaders in community colleges should evaluate their performance support system to determine if their current infrastructure promotes an effective, efficient process for facilitating a consistent practice of closing the loop. The present study will provide guidance and insight to community college leaders who are in the earliest stages of designing and implementing an organizational practice of evaluation. In this study, participants described that evaluation and closing the loop was more likely to take place if there were processes in place that made evaluation and performance improvement generally more straight- forward, easy to do, and clearly defined. A systematic framework and effective infrastructure could include:

1. **Leaders Talk about Evaluation:** setting the stage that reinforces the importance and relevance of evaluation helps to promote a change in culture and then keep the practice going.
2. **Expectation Clarification:** strategies that clarify the reason and requirement for measuring initiative results and outcomes. Clarification regarding which initiatives and at what level follow a formal process for results oversight. Identify

concrete strategies that integrate leaders into the communication and practice of evaluation activities.

3. **Support:** assistance for employees from skilled staff available to assist in evaluation activities; feedback for participants as they progress in their evaluation skills.
4. **Templates:** templates enabling participants to easily summarize the charge, purpose, objectives, milestones, and proposed outcomes of performance initiatives.
5. **Data Storage:** base structures where results are reported and easily accessed.
6. **Results Management:** Templates for reporting results, venues, events, and timelines to report results; timelines and protocols for amending and reassessing initiatives based on results.
7. **Recognition**: recognition systems that reward participation in evaluation activities.

The elements in this list closely align with the work of Carl Binder (2012) as he advanced the work of Gilbert's Behavior Engineering Model (Binder, 1998) and developed his Six Boxes concept. The results in this study and recommendations for practice, provide emphasis and reinforcement that Binder's concept and tool helps leaders focus effectively on the accurate identification of the cause of performance problems. Effectively doing this helps organizations better target efforts to impact performance improvement. It is recommended that community college leaders reacquaint themselves with the fundamental concepts in this model. Whether the need for performance improvement is in the adoption of a practice of evaluating and closing the loop to determine if initiatives achieve their intended outcomes, or another performance gap in the community college environment, the organizational elements that need to be considered are essential to understand.

Binder and Riha (2016) indicated that, “Anything you can envision or select that is intended to influence behavior can be sorted into one or more of the boxes…” (p. 6). Binder described the importance of training and development but emphasized the need to look at other factors influencing performance. One of the factors, communication, as he describes “…it is at least as important that we find common ground for describing and discussing the human performance required for execution of strategies and tactics designed to achieve business goals. We need to communicate in order to understand and agree on the details” (Binder, 2012, p. 3).

The framework and structure needed to reinforce the practice of evaluation and closing the loop described in the list above, touch on most of the elements in the Six Boxes concept as seen in Figure 5.2.

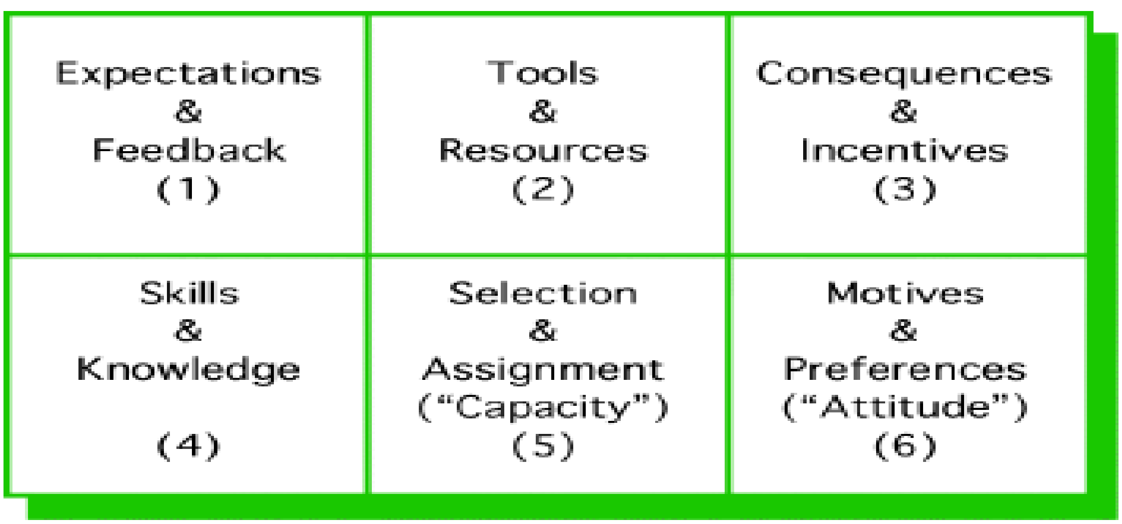

Figure 5.2. Carl Binder’s Six Boxes. (Gilbert, 1978).

Tinto (2012) suggests that effective investing for public community colleges begins with assessing those aspects of institutional functioning that require improvement. He identified that this was the underlying reasoning behind the Lumina Foundation initiative Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count. This initiative moved member institutions to establish a systematic framework for collecting information about the outcomes of institutional initiatives intended to better impact student success.

Future Research

1. **Using Data**. These study results reinforced the awareness of the need for community colleges to establish and maintain a performance management infrastructure. Even high-performing community colleges may lack the structures needed to ensure that evaluation activities take place consistently and effectively. But as a next step, researchers interested in understanding evaluation practice in community colleges, could study the capacity to use evaluation data rather than simply the capacity to collect evaluation data. As described above, community colleges do not evaluate the impact of their programs routinely and when they do, they often do not use the results to make improvements in their approaches.
2. **Rewards and Incentives**. Understanding more about what motivates employees would be valuable. As indicated above in Chapter 4, when participants were asked to describe reward or incentive strategies used in their organization, most responses focused on monetary rewards and answered the question as if those were the only kinds of incentives. Jenkins (2011) indicated that “When the organization does not support initiative, only employees with high personal initiative reach high levels of innovative performance; but when the organization

actively encourages and supports initiative, employees with high and low levels of personal initiative reach similar levels of performance" (p. 21). Directly speaking to employees about what motives and engages them would be valuable.

Summary and Conclusion

This study reinforces the need for consistent, concrete systems and processes in place that promote but also require evaluation activities. Without clear guidelines, expectations, accountability, support, and systems, evaluation is left to chance. Additionally, high-performing community colleges may describe the importance of leadership engagement (including the role of leaders in follow-up) but may still be successful on many levels without strong or consistent leadership engagement in the promotion or reinforcement of the importance of evaluation. Community college leaders who endeavor to build and reinforce a practice of evaluation must focus on establishing a performance management infrastructure that clarifies all aspects of evaluation practice.

Community colleges, as well as the broader community of higher education, continue to face scrutiny regarding their relevance and necessity. Cohen (2001) said accountability in higher education and community colleges is "here to stay" (p. 69). Further, Gordon and Fischer (2018) describes the need for leaders in higher education to endeavor strategically to deliver and describe the value of higher education and that leaders will struggle to dispute concerns and claims that higher education is not effective or efficient without the ability to measure performance and communicate results.

Tinto (2012) suggests that community colleges must engage in specific impactful actions to improve student success and institutional effectiveness, including the call to "invest in long-term program development and ongoing assessment of program and institutional functioning" (p. 121). Additionally, Mellow and Heelan (2014) indicate "we believe the future of public higher education rests upon a wider understanding of the promise of the American community college" (p. xvii). This broader understanding as well as the identification and application of explicit strategies that help community colleges understand and act upon best practices will ensure that community colleges remain viable. The present study sought to enlighten practitioners seeking to implement strategies to help measure and identify most effective practices. As community colleges remain an important element in the higher education system, they must persist and progress, most particularly as they continue to serve those whose opportunities for higher education are otherwise absent. An original American concept.

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Appendix A – Questionnaire

Building Evaluation Capacity in Community Colleges

Part 1 - Background Questions

1. **Estimated student headcount in most recently completed fall term, all students, all campuses, all branches:**
   - Under 2,000
   - 2,000 - 5,000
   - 5,000 - 10,000
   - 10,000 - 20,000
   - 20,000 or above

2. **Estimated number of employees, all employee types, all campuses, all branches:**
   - Under 200
   - 200 - 400
   - 400 - 1,000
   - 1,000 - 1,500
   - Over 1,500

3. **The position title you hold at the organization?**

   What are your primary roles?

   How long have you served in your current position?

   Are you the person responsible for the accreditation program at your institution?

4. **Are there any employees at the college responsible for helping employees with evaluation activities (helping to develop evaluation methods and tools, gathering evaluation information, helping to analyze outcome information, etc)?**
   - Yes
   - No

   If so, could you describe their role and how many employees do this work?

5. **Is anyone at the college specifically tasked with overseeing follow-up evaluation and ensuring that outcomes or impacts of initiatives are measured?**
   - Yes
   - No

   If so, what is the title of that person?

Back Save Next

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Part 2 How Often do you Engage in Evaluation or Closing the Loop

6. When your organization tries something new to improve student success or organizational effectiveness, do you evaluate to determine if it achieved the intended success?

- Yes
- No

7. If yes, how often does your organization go back to check to see if new initiatives worked?

- Less than 25% of the time
- About 50% of the time
- Most of the time, over 75%

8. Please describe any strategies your organization uses to reinforce the practice of closing the loop (going back to check on initiatives) to ensure that new initiatives achieve their intended outcomes? For example, an organization that requires that new initiatives be discussed with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to establish in advance how and when the department/stakeholders will measure the impact of the initiative.

9. Is there a strategy that works best?

Back Save Next

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Part 3 Building Evaluation Culture

As organizations work to create and maintain a practice of using evidence to measure performance and make decisions, they engage in activities that help promote this culture. Culture for this study refers to habits, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of people in an organization. Some examples include special celebrations to show performance results or special recognition for those who engage in evaluation activities. Could you describe your organization by responding to the following?

10. My organization is working to reinforce a culture of evaluation, (measuring the success and performance of programs and initiatives):

- Not consistently - less than 25% of the time
- Somewhat consistently - half of the time
- Most of the time - 75% of the time
- All the time - nearly 100% of the time

11. Please describe any strategies or actions that are helping to reinforce this culture? Examples here:

12. What has been the result of these strategies?

Back Save Next

Building Evaluation Capacity in Community Colleges

Part 4 Accountability for Evaluating Outcomes

Community colleges across the country are faced with diminishing resources and increased accountability, requiring more evidence of performance. In this study, we are interested in how leaders promote accountability for measurement and evaluation practices across the organization. For example, when a new Math Boot Camp is established, an Open Lab is available three afternoons a week and is staffed with Tutors, the organization will measure the outcomes of students who use the service, and will submit their results to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.

For your organization, could you please answer the following:

13. When college employees initiate new programs employees are held accountable for evaluating the outcomes of the initiative to determine if it achieved the intended results?

Totally agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree,	Totally disagree	N/A
○	○	○	○	○

14. Could you please indicate any strategy or strategies that, in your organization, effectively promote accountability for evaluating outcomes? Please indicate any of these or others that apply;

- ○ Providing training
- ○ Requiring follow-up to measure outcomes
- ○ Celebrating evaluation activities, no matter results
- ○ Leadership engagement in following up on results
- ○ Others

15. What has been the result of these strategies?

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Part 5 Employee Engagement in Evaluating Impacts/Outcomes

Research indicates that employees are often fearful when their programs or initiatives are reviewed to determine if they achieve their intended results. In some organizations this fear inhibits the practice of checking into the results of initiatives. For your organization could you answer the following question:

16. What are effective strategies used in your organization to help employees feel less intimidated and less defensive about evaluation of programs, initiatives, or processes?

Please select any of the following and/or others;

- [ ] Rewarding participation in evaluation
- [ ] Regular training and development about how to evaluate outcomes of initiatives
- [ ] Celebrate learning about resu
- [ ] Regularly talk about the need to close the loop
- [ ] Other

What has been the result of these strategies

17. What do you think is the most effective strategy or strategies used in your organization to engage employees in evaluation activities? (To help employees get involved in a positive way in measuring the outcomes of their work?)

18. Could you identify the result of this strategy?

Back Save Next

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Part 6 Rewarding Employees

19. **When incentives are valued by employees they can be effective in motivating engagement and performance. Could you answer the following question about your organization;**

In my organization, incentives are used to promote and encourage evaluation activities:

Totally agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Totally disagree
○	○	○	○

20. **If your organization uses incentives to encourage activities that measure the performance of programs, initiatives, processes, etc, could you please provide a brief description and example of these incentives?**

What has been the result?

If your organization uses incentives, how effective are these incentives in encouraging employees to participate in evaluation practices?

Not applicable	Not really effective	Somewhat effective	Highly effective
○	○	○	○

21. **What do you think motivates employees in your organization to measure and review the impact of performance initiatives? Please Give Examples:**

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Part 7 – Impact of Leadership

Research indicates that leaders make a significant impact on organizational culture and practice.

22. Please answer the following question:

In my organization, leaders communicate the importance of assessing performance of initiatives and programs;

Totally agree	Somewhat agree,	Somewhat disagree	Totally disagree
○	○	○	○

23. In your organization, how do leaders demonstrate that measuring performance and using evidence to make decisions is important? Give examples:

24. What has been the impact?

Back Save Next

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Follow-Up Telephone Interview

If you would be willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview, your time would be greatly appreciated. If you are willing, we would dig deeper into some of your responses on this survey in order to gain more insight into your organization. This telephone call would last approximately 15 - 30 minutes but more or less depending upon your availability.

25. Would you be willing to participate in a short telephone interview?

- [ ] **Yes**
- [ ] **No, Thanks**

If "Yes" I will send a follow-up email to you. Please provide your email address here;

Please let me know if you would like the results of this study sent to you.

- [ ] **Yes, Email to Send Results**
- [ ] **No**

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR ALL YOUR TIME TODAY, I APPRECIATE IT SO MUCH.

Very Respectfully,

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Back Save Finish