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Shared Leadership in Higher Education: A Phenomenological Case-Study of the Impact of Shared Leadership on the Admission and Transfer Staff at a Regional Comprehensive State University

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Shared Leadership in Higher Education:
A Phenomenological Case-Study of the Impact of Shared Leadership
on the Admission and Transfer Staff at a Regional Comprehensive State University

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree in Leadership Studies from
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By
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I was lucky enough to grow up in a family that values education, leadership, and service. These have become the hallmarks of my own life and professional career. Achieving this degree has proven to be the culmination of these three themes in my own life. I have spent the past four years studying leadership's applications in the higher education field through service to my community. I cannot thank my parents enough for their living examples of servant leadership to their own community. Mom and Dad, you have moved me to take my life down a pathway similar to your own, and I can only hope to inspire my own children to similar joy in life through such commitments.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
The Case	5
Introduction	6
Research Question & Delimiters	8
Literature review	9
<i>Theoretical Foundations</i>	9
<i>Shared Leadership Behaviors</i>	11
<i>Outcomes of Shared Leadership Applications</i>	13
Methodology	16
Analysis	19
<i>Positive Behaviors</i>	19
<i>Positive Outcomes</i>	21
<i>Negative Impacts</i>	24
<i>Programmatic Commentary & Recommendations</i>	25
Conclusion	27
Moving Forward	28
References	30
Appendix I	33
<i>Consent Form and Survey</i>	33
Appendix II	33
<i>Survey Questions</i>	33
Appendix III	34
<i>Horizontalized Data in Clusters, Grouped by Theme: Positive, Programmatic, or Negative</i>	34
POSITIVE THEMES	34
PROGRAMMING THEMES	37
NEGATIVE THEMES	38

Abstract

This exploratory research project was structured as a case study which sought to analyze the impact on relevant staff members of a comprehensive public university of a shared leadership model being applied to a transfer student recruitment program. Using questions, developed from the included literature review, which were administered via a secure electronic survey program, data were collected anonymously. These data were analyzed using phenomenological qualitative research methods including:

- horizontalization: a process by which significant data are culled from transcripts;
- clustering: a process by which data are grouped by similarity; and
- thematic groupings: a process by which the clusters are interpreted by the researcher as fitting into larger categories (Creswell, 2013)

In the end, the data from seven of the nine invited participants showed saturation in responses with roughly two thirds showing a positive impact on staff members. The roughly one quarter of the data which showed negative impacts were mostly constructive in nature and so will serve to inform the continual improvement of the recruitment program as well as the shared leadership style being applied to that program. A final one tenth of the data included further constructive commentary on the program itself without a bias either positive or negative.

The Case

The regional comprehensive liberal arts state university targeted by this study is, and has historically been, the state leader in welcoming admitted transfer students from other institutions of higher education. One of the programs typically utilized by staff in the Undergraduate Admission Office to recruit transfer students is the Transfer Interview Day. At such events an admission officer visits a community college and meets individually with students interested in transferring to the university. The interviews consist of a conversation about the transfer process and policies, as well as the completion of a preliminary transfer evaluation which provides the student with an understanding of how their prior credits might fit into his or her desired bachelor's degree at the university.

Prior to 2009 the entire Transfer Interview Day program was administered and implemented by a single staff member. Serving as an example of a vertical leadership model, a single person made all the decisions regarding which colleges to visit, when to plan those visits, how many students to meet with at the visit. This staff member also conducted all of the interviews at the visits. In 2009 the admission office experienced some significant staffing changes. As a result of these changes, two additional professional staff members were asked to provide support for the program. Historically, the Transfer Student Interview Day program primarily served prospective transfer students from three local community colleges; and so with three professional staff now sharing the administration of the program the decision was made to implement what can now be recognized as a shared leadership model for the program's administration. Since the change in 2009, the three professional staff members share in the decision making process for the program including the decision to each take on a liaison role with one of the three community colleges including implementing the Transfer Interview Day program each with their respective community college partner.

While the office regularly conducts its own research in the effectiveness of the program itself in recruiting students, there has not been any analysis of the new management style and its impact of the staff implementing the program. As one of three professional staff members sharing leadership of the program since 2009, the researcher sought to conduct research into the impact of the new leadership style on his fellow staff members. Serving as a participant observer, the researcher was able to blend both professional and academic concerns into this research project for both graduate credit as well as the betterment of his office workplace.

Introduction

Broad changes in leadership models within an organization can often be slow and difficult. This is especially true in institutions of higher education as evidenced by the age and frequency of the too-oft repeated platitude “the wheels of academe turn slowly.” However, the leadership of particular projects, even in a higher education setting, can be changed with some speed and ease.

The admission office at a mid-sized, public, comprehensive university administers one such project. The program works in partnership with three local community colleges which range from small to medium in size, and all offer a blend of technical and liberal arts associates degrees. Together these institutions work to assist transfer students through their recruitment by, and transition to, the university. Prior to 2009 this program was administered by a single staff member; however, during 2009 the management of the program changed reflecting staffing changes in the admission office. Currently a team of three staff members oversees this program, with each staff member serving as liaison to, and primary contact for, prospective transfer students from each of their respective partner community colleges.

This research project utilized a phenomenological case study compiled by a participant observer in order to study the impact of that change, from vertical to shared leadership, on those staff members directly involved with the program. Similar management changes were recently implemented in that office with no more than anecdotal analysis of the impact on other associated staff members. In contrast, this qualitative research project sought to explore the impact of such a change on those staff members involved in implementing the transfer student recruitment program.

Many leadership scholars have highlighted the positive outcomes of implementing a shared leadership model. Some researchers point out that a shared leadership model is often enabled by professional partnerships and specific work occurring early in such partnerships to handle the division of credit (O'Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2002). A review of the relevant literature, which follows, shows social scientific research, often utilizing case studies and surveys, has often been conducted in order to study the effective behaviors required in a shared leadership model, positive and negative outcomes, and applications of the model in school settings. There seem to be significant numbers of these application case studies at both the K-12 level as well as a growing number at the community college level. However, studies of applications of a shared leadership model at the university level seem to occur infrequently. By analyzing the impact of a shared leadership model, applied at the university level, on the personnel involved, this project could add to that field of literature as well as serve to assist the university being studied in better supporting its staff members.

Research Question & Delimiters

The first of three research questions in this exploratory study were crafted to determine if participants could recognize the differences between the previous leadership style and the new style. The second set of nine questions asked how the participants thought this shift affected them, their fellow staff members, and the working relationships among all the participants. By asking specifically about communications, motivations, work flow, satisfaction, and perceptions of fellow staff members the researcher intended to glean information about both the behaviors and outcomes of the new shared leadership model on the staff implementing the transfer recruitment program.

The project only reviewed the impact, positive or negative, on the staff members affected by the management change. It did not review the effectiveness of the management change on recruitment and or yield numbers. Nor did it serve to inform annual performance evaluations of how these employees perform the specific duties of their respective jobs. It did not serve as a basis by which decisions could be made regarding the continuing employment of those employees impacted by the management change. Finally, it did not serve as a programmatic evaluation of the transfer recruitment program, nor of the partnerships therein.

For the purposes of this study the researcher defined vertical leadership as a hierarchical model through which one person exerts influence over their subordinate staff members. Shared leadership was defined by the researcher as the process by which a team of participants share influence equally among themselves. The first assumption of this research project was that none of the participants would leave their current workplace position during the timeframe of the study, and indeed none did. The project also assumed that the interviewees had enough trust in the researcher, as their professional colleague, to be willing to be interviewed and be willing to answer all questions thoroughly. However, only seven of the nine invited participants actually

chose to participate, and many responses were either left blank or in one case the participant chose to respond by writing “NA” which the researcher interpreted a standing for “not-applicable.” Despite this lack of complete participation, the data did reach a saturation point in which responses became common enough among participants that commonalities could be recognized and analyzed.

One of the major limitations of this study was the concern for confidentiality. This concern necessitated a project design which precluded the kind of follow-up or clarifying questions which could have come up in a face-to-face interview and potentially led to more thorough responses. Despite this limitation there were enough responses, and a saturation of common responses to allow for proper qualitative analysis.

Literature review

Theoretical Foundations

There are numerous and disparate definitions of leadership (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). One of the first definitions introduced in this field is based on the historical idea of a great king or hero, whose specific achievements or inheritance conferred upon him the mantle of leader (Carlyle, 1995). This then gave him the ability to exercise power over his community. Such a concept of leadership, based on a single person at the top of a hierarchy, is commonly known as vertical leadership (Chemers, 1995). This leadership model is also common to many contemporary organizations with a similar hierarchy built into their structure, such as most institutions of higher education with a president, dean, chancellor, or headmaster.

A more recent conceptualization of leadership explores how power and influence spread not from a single person, but are instead distributed among a group of people. The concept of synergy: wherein the product of a group is greater than the individual output of each of its

members, is the most common goal of this leadership style. This idea, applied to the practice of guiding an organization, is often referred to as shared leadership (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003). It is also called team leadership, democratic leadership, or distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005). Many institutions of higher education, while led by a single individual also have a level, somewhere below that individual, of shared governance which includes faculty. It is only fairly recently that shared governance has come to include input from administrative staff and students as well as those faculty members. The administrators of colleges and universities, while typically carrying titles connoting vertical leadership positions like the aforementioned president, provost, chancellor, dean, etc., are beginning to think of themselves as members of a community of leaders regardless of such traditionally conferred titles (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006).

Recently more and more schools, at all levels of the educational system, are moving to adapt this kind of leadership model to their structure as the demands on teachers and administrators grow more complex (Lindahl, 2008). Others point out that the structure of most schools, especially institutions of higher education, lends itself to efforts leaning toward more shared leadership (Burke, 2010). Schools are shifting, being viewed as learning communities with distributed power, and so the shared leadership model is being embraced more often (Beatty, 2007). Even colleges, in their efforts to be more efficient and effective, are looking to shared leadership models for their governance (Trites & Weehar, 2003). While such institutions of higher education have had a history of governance being shared with faculty, they have been more recently including staff and students in that shared governance. Research points out that due to these shifts, and the need to balance the mission of a college or university against its bottom line as a business, the shared leadership model has enjoyed growing positive perceptions (Lowman, 2010).

Shared Leadership Behaviors

Shared leadership efforts have been shown to work best when participants are practicing particular prescribed behaviors. The sources of these prescriptions are often professional publications in the educational field, which are, in turn, based on the authors' reviews of relevant literature (Lindahl, 2008) (Pearce, 2004) (Bligh, Pearce, & Kohles, 2006) (Lambert, 2002) (Shuffler, Weise, Salas, & Burke, 2010) (Yammarino, Momford, Connelly, & Dionne, 2010). Such commonly prescribed behaviors often include "collaboration, integration, encouragement, learning, modeling, challenging, [and] building consensus" (Lindahl, 2008). These kinds of behaviors seem commonplace to anyone who has ever participated in a group project setting. However, the tone of the aforementioned publications would seem to indicate that such behaviors appear to be difficult concepts for K-12 educators working within a traditional hierarchy to incorporate into their daily work. One researcher points out that some principals have implemented shared leadership merely as a method through which to delegate administrative tasks, relegating their teacher-leaders to filing paperwork rather than guiding institutional decisions (Lindhal, 2008).

Lateral influence and service to the organization are also common behaviors in a shared leadership model (Pearce, 2004). These would seem to be similarly challenging to those K-12 teacher-leaders more familiar with a hierarchal model. Here again, this is especially true as these behaviors are often used by those at the top of the hierarchy to motivate the teacher-leaders to take on the aforementioned administrative tasks. On a positive note these are exactly the kinds of behaviors one finds in collegiate committees such as the one being studied.

Other prescribed behaviors include trust and, commitment (Bligh, Pearce, & Kohles, 2006). Yet another such behavior includes "forging links with community resources" (Lambert, 2002). This last seems to be an especially hot topic at the K-12 level as school boards are more

often being forced to make decisions about the quality of the education their school system provides based on financial considerations. These financial issues in turn are all too often forced upon those communities by the political decisions of state and federal governments rather than parents & local communities. Shared leadership comes into play when those school boards utilize such links with their communities to make communal decisions about their districts, including input from those parents and local politicians. Conversely, a more typical superintendent, exercising vertical leadership, would make such decisions on his or her own, without consulting any community members or other constituents. These community connections are also crucial at the collegiate level as universities are feeling increasing pressure to respond to their community members' demands to become engines of economic growth and reach out to community colleges to increase the recruitment of adult and transfer students.

Additional prescribed behaviors may be considered facets of facilitation and include monitoring team dynamics and supporting co-participants (Shuffler, Weise, Salas, & Burke, 2010). Facilitation, in turn, is a skill set so closely related to teaching that these behaviors would seem to be the 'low-hanging fruit' which could be easily implemented at both the K-12 and university levels. Also included in this list of prescribed behaviors is the practice of knowledge and information sharing (Yammarino, Momford, Connelly, & Dionne, 2010). Given the nature of educational discourse these, in theory, should also be easily incorporated into shared leadership relationships between administrators and teachers.

Reviewing the literature referenced in such prescriptive articles from educational journals, one finds that there is plenty of extant research to back up such recommendations. One also finds additional behaviors which research demonstrates can generate success in a shared leadership model. These include such proven techniques as establishing a shared vision and the

use of participant observers to give real-time feedback to members about their participation patterns (Meyers, Meyers, & Gelzheiser, 2001). It is through case studies of these practices that researchers have documented teachers and administrators building distributed influence. Team members playing different roles is yet another behavior associated with successful shared leadership (O'Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2002). Here again, these were demonstrated through case-studies, though in that particular study the business industry was the focus.

A shared leadership model is often enabled by professional partnerships and specific work occurring early in such partnerships to handle the division of credit (O'Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2002). Reallocating tasks when necessary, seeking commonalities among participants, and utilizing a fluid approach to change are also strong practices of shared leadership teams in business (O'Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2002). In order for staff to feel empowered to participate in a shared leadership model; effective planning, preparation, commitment, assessment of the organization and its culture, and continual re-evaluation are all required to be in place for the team (Scott & Caress, 2005). These behaviors amount to a significant shift in the relationships between a school's administrators and its faculty. While teachers fundamentally understand preparation and assessment, the administrators better understand organizational structure and re-evaluation processes, and so the shared leadership model allows the two to work through their respective areas of strength as equals rather than adversaries across a power differential.

Outcomes of Shared Leadership Applications

Efficiency and effectiveness are two of the most common outcomes arising from of a shared leadership style (Trites & Weehar, 2003). Additional outcomes including improved program quality or service consistency and reduction of impact from personnel turnover arose from the same case study involving administrative turnover at a community college (Trites & Weehar, 2003). Other outcomes of a shared leadership model can include effective prediction of

new project performance as seen in business case studies (Ensley, Hmielski, & Pearce, 2006). In the public sector, other case studies show better service delivery (Steinheider & Wuestewald, 2008). These effects of shared leadership could prove particularly interesting if the impacts of the shared leadership model being studied in this current project turn out as hypothesized. Positive results would then serve as support for further implementation of a distributed leadership model into other ongoing projects in the admission office.

The results of the shared leadership implementation with which this project was concerned are exclusively focused on the impacts on the personnel of the organization. As previously noted in business case studies improving change management, aligning decisions with implementation, defining accountability, sharing responsibility, collaboration, responding to emerging trends, and a greater understanding of the needs of an organization's constituents were all impacts on the personnel of the businesses (Trites & Weegar, 2003). In another case study of police officers researchers documented improved employee attitude, commitment, and greater productivity as additional staffing-related outcomes of shared leadership (Steinheider & Wustewald, 2008). These are significant to this current study as these factors should be easy for participants to identify in their own experiences within a shared leadership model.

Looking specifically at teachers and principals, researchers found that staff coherence and stability may also be considered outcomes of shared leadership as they may be achieved through tension between vertical and shared leadership models (Printy & Marks, 2006). Based on case studies of "change management teams" (Pearce & Sims Jr., 2002, p. 172) shared leadership behaviors can be considered to encourage independent action, opportunity thinking, self-development, and self-reward (Pearce & Sims Jr., 2002). These would seem to support others'

findings that job satisfaction, for teachers specifically, is yet another outcome of a shared leadership model (Woods & Weasmer, 2002).

Like any team effort, shared leadership can have its potential pitfalls. These include slower decisions, slower project implementations, increased time to reach consensus, lower quality decisions, processing hiccups during team breaks, additional burdens on administration, misperceptions of ownership of decisions, confusion of roles, and tensions between higher- and lower-level employees (Trites & Weehar, 2003). Whether such workplace tensions translate from the community colleges of the case study to the university being studied in this project should be borne out in the data given that two of the participants are classified staff who indirectly report to the two professional staff participants.

Those sharing leadership in self-managed teams typically direct work-related activities for themselves as well as for subordinates (Yang & Shao, 1996). Additional research shows that “the division of tasks among co-leaders often affects their subordinates’ work” (O’Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2002). This further supports the decision to include as participants some of those classified staff in the admission office who are indirect subordinates of the professional staff participants.

Some researchers go so far as to point out “the fragility of effective distributed leadership” (VanAmeijde et al, 2009, p. 777). They add that this is especially true when team members felt that the vertical hierarchy outside their workgroup was bearing undo pressure on the team and or its work processes (VanAmeijde et al, 2009). Such findings serve as further support for the selection of yet another two participants of this study: two managers of the transfer affairs section of the admission office. These are indirect supervisors of the two professional staff participants and are direct supervisors of the classified staff participants.

The simple truth is that leadership requires leaders who focus on influencing the people around them, rather than focusing on the tasks that need to get done (Saban and Wolfe, 2009). Thus shared leadership requires leaders who give and receive that influence equally with their professional colleagues. Whether utilizing management models from businesses or importing practices from health and public service industries, the field of education has a well-documented history of the implementation of shared leadership models. However, most of the peer-reviewed research focuses on the behaviors involved, or the outcomes of the shared leadership model in those other industries. The current research project sought to import some methodologies from those previous studies, yet refocus them on the impacts of a shared leadership model on the staff actually exerting distributed influence among themselves and their professional peers.

Methodology

Interviewing is a common tool for data collection in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). When the researcher is a member of a group being interviewed, this is considered participant observation (Creswell, 2013). Interviews need not necessarily be conducted in a face-to-face setting, especially when protecting confidentiality is a consideration. However, conducting interviews via computer-mediated communication carries significant potential for differences between the intent of the interviewees in their responses and the interviewer's interpretations of those responses. (Ramirez Jr., Zhang, McGrew, & Lin, 2007). Thus participant observers must be clear and constrained in the wording of their interview questions. Training offered through local IRB supervision assisted the process of wording survey questions in "plain language." Cultural differences may also play a part in the potential for differences in interpretation of responses. Researchers must also be deliberate in their understanding and negotiation of the differences between their own culture and that of the individuals they are

interviewing (Peshkin, 1984). In this particular case all participants work regularly with each other, and have for several years, thus cultural differences related to the understanding of the program being studied should be infrequent. Participant-observation through interviewing allows researchers to best understand the environment of their studies and its impact on those in that environment (Shuter, 2003). It is then an ideal methodology through which to study the impact of change to an environment and on the employees within (Shuter, 2003). The transition from vertical to shared leadership is indeed an environmental change for the program being studied; and so the researcher's position as a participant observer should prove beneficial, rather than a hindrance, to the study.

In this research project, the responses to open-ended interview questions, which were given in an electronic survey format, were analyzed using a phenomenological method based on finding commonalities among the answers to the survey questions. As mentioned earlier, the researcher was a participant-observer and so there existed the potential for personal bias based on knowledge of the participants. This was minimized through the use of the SNAP Survey program which allowed the data to be collected and reported to the researcher anonymously. Such anonymity served as an attempt to limit participants' potential concerns regarding reported data being used in the university's annual performance evaluations of its employees, or as a programmatic evaluation of the work they do day-to-day. The goal of the analysis was to review answers to interview questions in an open-minded manner and write up findings with an honest voice, thus attempting to further limit participant observer bias. As participants responded to open-ended interview questions through an electronic questionnaire, records of their responses were recorded and stored in the secure SNAP Survey database.

The group of participants was selected based on their connection to the recruitment program being studied. Two professional staff members who implement the recruitment program were selected for their direct oversight of the program being studied. Two of their indirect managers were also selected in order to diversify the pool of professional staff by including those in formal positions of authority. There were also two classified staff members at the university who were selected for their work with the program as well. Additionally the one Transfer Director at each of the three partner community colleges was similarly selected. It is interesting to note that all nine selected participants were women, and that this was an unintended consequence of the selection criteria. With a balance of internal employees and external contacts, as well as the inclusion of both supervisors and subordinates of the professional staff members who are implementing the transfer student recruitment program; the goal of the selection process was to get a well-rounded perspective on the impact of the recently adopted shared leadership model on all the staff implementing the recruitment program.

The previous literature review included sections highlighting both the inherent behaviors, and impacts of the shared leadership model on other educational institutions, as well as business and public service fields. These behaviors and common impacts led to two sets of interview questions developed to answer the research questions. The first two were designed to ascertain whether participants would be able to recognize the difference between the old and new leadership models, if not by name then at least by behavior and or practice. The last ten questions asked participants to compare the old and new leadership styles in order to gain a sense more precisely of how the practices and behaviors were being experienced by the staff members impacted by the new leadership style.

Analysis

Using a phenomenological analysis the responses from participants were horizontalized: a process by which data are culled from transcripts as individual statements and given equal weight (Creswell, 2013), then sorted into clusters of similar data points. These were then interpreted thematically by the researcher as either positive or negative perceptions of the impact of the shared leadership model. The majority of responses, roughly two thirds of the statements, did fall under the positive theme; specifically grouped into the following clusters: clarity, relationships, an ease in implementation, communication, supportiveness, flexibility, consistency, and a perceived general increase in some aspect of the program. The responses that fell into a negative theme comprised roughly a quarter of the total responses and were grouped into the following clusters: a perceived decrease in some aspect of the program, problematic differences between implementations, confusion, programmatic difficulties, or simply that there was no perceived change. A third theme of commentary which was not biased either positively or negatively also arose in the analysis. This theme included two clusters; one had commentary on how the program was currently being implemented, and the other cluster had some recommendations for additions or changes to the recruitment model or other transfer student services at the university.

Positive Behaviors

The participants were able to identify many of the best practices of a shared leadership model based on a sense of teamwork and greater community membership. Collaboration, integration, and encouragement were cited in the literature review as some of these kinds of behaviors (Lindhal, 2002) as well as “forging links with community resources” (Lambert, 2002). Responses describing these behaviors were included in the ‘relationships’ cluster: “benefitting from a consistent relationship,” “Collaborative with come[sic, some?], direct with others,”

“stronger relationship building with constituents,” “Gives me more connection with students,” “benefitting from a consistent relationship,” “grounded in more of a professional relationship.”

Additional positive behaviors identified in the literature centered more on interpersonal connections. These included trust and commitment (Bligh, Pearce, & Kohles, 2006) and monitoring team dynamics and supporting co-participants (Shuffler, Weise, Salas, & Burke, 2010). Here again responses from the survey mirrored these behaviors: “I know that I have people I can turn to with any unusual situations and people who will always be pleased to have students referred to them,” “supportive,” “direct support from specific individuals assigned to visit campus and assist... students is much appreciated.” Another example of positive behaviors of shared leadership from the literature review included “supporting co-participants” (Shuffler, Weise, Salas, & Burke, 2010); as one participant wrote: “I am motivated to support new initiatives recommended by my colleagues.”

Yet another set of best practices focused on “knowledge and information sharing” (Yammarino, Momford, Connelly, & Dionne, 2010) also called learning (Lindahl 2008). This was exemplified by one participant: “If I know of new courses being offered or if there are changes to course equivalents, I update the [computer] system and notify the transfer counselors as quickly as possible.” The practice described here by this participant also illustrates another shared leadership behavior: “Reallocating tasks when necessary, seeking commonalities among participants, and utilizing a fluid approach to change” (O’Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler, 2002).

Additional best practices touched upon the structure of the program. One of these included a framework using “professional partnerships,” (O’Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler 2002). For example one participant suggested: “This [program] should be viewed as a partnership between the two [collegiate] systems.” Another structural behavior was effective planning,

preparation, commitment, assessment of the organization and its culture, and continual re-evaluation (Scott & Caress, 2005). Examples of these behaviors were included in the cluster which demonstrated increases in various aspects of the program “more widely promoted,” “students have become more ‘savvy customers’,” “more visits,” “recruitment efforts, which have become more proactive,” and “continue to find ways to improve the service we provide.”

Positive Outcomes

In their responses, the participants were also able to identify some of the positive outcomes of shared leadership such as improved “program quality” (Trites & Weehar, 2003) such as one participant’s observation of “more face to face time” and “better overall satisfaction.” Another positive outcome identified was the “effective prediction of new project performance” (Steinholder & Wustewald, 2008) and better service delivery (Steinheider & Wuestewald, 2008). These were also identified by one participant’s observation that “two of the community colleges are mirroring one another's programs more than in the past.” Such “mirroring” would allow the admission office to postulate similar results in recruitment numbers from one community college to another. A related outcome was improved service consistency and reduction of impact from personnel turnover (Trites & Weehar, 2003). And in this too, the “mirroring” of these programs between community college partners would allow for less time spent training a new employee to implement the program at *each* community college as it is implemented more consistently across those partner institutions.

Efficiency and effectiveness are also positive outcomes of this leadership model (Trites & Weehar, 2003); as well as commitment and greater productivity (Steinheider and Wustewald, 2008). These were described by participants as “more transcript evaluations,” “more student participants,” “more visits,” and “faster decisions on transfer applicants.” Additional positive outcomes include improved change management, aligning decisions with implementation,

defining accountability, shared responsibility, collaboration, responses to emerging trends, and a greater understanding of the needs of an organization's constituents (Trites & Weechar, 2003). Participants were able to recognize these with a general sense of flexibility: "demonstrated flexibility of scheduling." "more flexible in scheduling," "personnel who are able to visit more frequently makes it more feasible to arrange for students to meet," "tried to be as accommodating as possible by offering many Transfer Student Interview Days...[or] set up an appointment for" other options to meet with students, " and "accessible." Staff coherence and stability were also strong outcomes of shared leadership (Printy and Marks, 2006). Here a consistency was noted by participants: "it has helped to have a bit more consistent staffing" and "greater consistency of visits."

It is interesting that the use of participant observers to give real-time feedback to members about their participation patterns (Meyers, Meyers, & Gelzheiser, 2001) is considered an outcome of the shared leadership model. This is especially true given the researcher's role in this case study as a participant observer studying the impact of the phenomenon of the change in leadership style from vertical to shared leadership. It was the plan of the researcher to share the findings from this study with his colleagues and supervisors with the intention to give feedback about the shared leadership style. Thus this study is, itself, both a behavior and outcome of the shared leadership model.

Two final outcomes, one of which was most significant to the study was "improved employee attitude" (Steinholder & Wustewald, 2008); the other was job satisfaction (Woods & Weasmer, 2002). These were evidenced by one participant's comments which also sum up those of some other participants: "I do want things to work well for all members of the Transfer

Team.” This sense of camaraderie is a behavior any leader would wish to foster among their fellow staff.

One of the survey questions specifically asked participants to reflect on how the new leadership model impacted the communication among colleagues and between the two institutions. The responses in this area seemed to support two other positive outcomes of shared leadership: lateral influence (Pearce, 2004), and establishing a shared vision (Meyers, Meyers, & Gelzheiser, 2001). Participants described their communication as “more utilized,” “ongoing and consistent,” “a bit more of an open communication,” and “responsive.”

There were several behaviors and outcomes identified in the literature, but were not supported by survey responses in this study. These included: “modeling, challenging, [and] building consensus” (Lindahl, 2008), service to the organization (Pearce, 2004), team members playing different roles in leadership (O’Toole, Galbraith, & Lawler 2002), and the encouragement of independent action, opportunity thinking, self-development, and self-reward (Pearce & Sims Jr., 2002). While it is not clear why these outcomes were not identified by participants in this particular program; one could speculate that these outcomes could be more prevalent in workplace applications in either the business or human service fields. This could be due to the fact that in such fields employees’ day-to-day work covers more areas for such outcomes to arise than the narrow focus of this study on one particular recruitment program.

In contrast, there were a couple of outcomes in which shared leadership arose from the data, that were not found in the literature. One of these was a sense of clarity: “very good and clear with expectations,” “clearer sense of where applicants are in the application cycle,” “things are clearer now.” Again, one could speculate that these outcomes are a result of the positive communication experienced by participants and discussed earlier.

Another outcome not found in the literature was a sense of the ease with which the staff members were running the program. They describe their experiences as “easier, despite the differences” among the three community colleges. They go on to point out that “transfer counselors are now able to find some of the more current unofficial evaluations on the common drive. This is especially helpful when working off-site.” And here again one could speculate that such improvements again come from the improved communication discussed earlier.

Negative Impacts

Participants also found some negative aspects of the shared leadership model. Case studies in K-12 applications of shared leadership pointed out that some principals have implemented shared leadership merely as a method through which to delegate administrative tasks (Lindhal, 2008). This is apparently common to university settings as one participant points out: “There are times when it appears that the receiving institution carries the brunt of the responsibility for these efforts.” A similar sentiment arose in other applications of shared leadership, for example “additional burdens on administration” (Trites & Weehar, 2003). As another participant pointed out their opinion that it is “necessary to cater to each community college differently.”

Other negative impacts of shared leadership can sometimes include slower decisions, increased time to reach consensus, lower quality decisions, processing hiccups during team breaks, misperceptions of ownership of decisions, confusion of roles, and tensions between higher- and lower-level employees (Trites & Weehar, 2003). These were supported in this case by participants who stated that the recruitment program as they understood it “did not... [exist] until the Fall of 2012.” Another added that “since mid-Fall 2011... It has gone through some iterations[sic] with a Graduate Assistant on campus weekly and some extra programming,” as well as pointing out that the program is “smaller in scope,” meeting “fewer student participants,”

and visits were “less frequent.” The perception of the recruitment program shrinking in these responses may be a result of these negative impacts like slower decisions, and confusion of roles (Trites & Weehar, 2003). A related example of another pitfall of shared leadership is “slower project implementations” (Trites & Weehar, 2003). One participant observed the program running “now just a few visits a semester” rather than the prior “on campus weekly” schedule. This has direct results on the number of students being recruited and served by this program.

Yet another problem perceived by participants was “the fragility of effective distributed leadership” (VanAmeijde et al, 2009, p. 777) when a vertical hierarchy outside a team exerts undo pressure. This was clear from one participant in particular who noted that “Communication with external colleagues has increased over the years, but due to other factors not related to USM management style.” Another participant recommended that it is “important for... personnel serving transfer students [to] be available to them, able to travel to community colleges, and dedicate the greatest percentage of job responsibilities to the transfer population.” Because the confidential nature of the online survey format precluded follow up questions, the researcher could not ascertain if this idea was generated due to a specific event or implementation. However, given the additional responsibilities each of the professional staff members have in addition to implementing this program; one could infer from the text that the participant making this suggestion was feeling underserved by the program. Or, if this was one of those professional staff members, then perhaps that person felt that they are underserving transfer students with respect to the time that they are able to dedicate to the program.

Programmatic Commentary & Recommendations

A third theme that arose from the data consisted of two clusters. The first of these clusters collected commentary on how the program is currently being implemented which did not show a bias either positive or negative. For example, one researcher pointed out that “visits [are]

scheduled like invited events,” and another added that “transfer counselors are well prepared... ready to work with students.” Such commentary on the current program was enlightening to the researcher as those data served to illustrate the parts of the recruitment program which were being done well enough to merit specific mention from the staff and community college partners. One participant highlighted the format of the program: “visits... [are] designed to give a one-on-one opportunity... to meet..., discuss..., and review;” another pointed out that “the interview day is a small piece of a full complement of services.”

The second cluster consisted of recommendations for potential improvements to either the recruitment program, or other transfer services. Examples of recommendations for the recruitment program studied included “personnel provide ... degree audits and advising” which can only happen in partnership with the various academic departments at the university. More generally, one participant would remind those implementing the recruitment initiative that “programs need to be geared toward the student populations at each of the community colleges.” Other recommendations were geared toward other transfer services such as a general recommendation that the university be “doing transfer programming once [students arrive]... on campus,” specifically “special transfer orientations.”

Such recommendations were important to the study as they provided input toward the purpose of the study, namely the further implementation of the shared leadership model not only continuing in this Transfer Interview Day program, but also potentially being applied to other programs within the admission office. Such recommendations, from both constituents *and* professional partners, should attract the attention of folks in upper-level management positions within that office since they have the budgetary and structural control to adopt these

recommendations, or at least the political connections within the university to advocate for their implementation.

Conclusion

Based on all the data collected, there was not a clear answer to the first research question: whether participants could recognize the difference in leadership style and articulate that difference. The data from the first two questions on the survey illustrate some confusion about the management styles: “I’m not sure what new management style is being referred to,” or “I’m not sure what you’re asking in “management style.” Others were not sure that there was a difference in the program before and after the 2009 change in leadership style: “Again, I don’t see a huge change in either management styles or communication flow.” Yet, responses like these occurred much less frequently than those data points that indicated clear differences such as “demonstrated flexibility of scheduling,” and “Since 2009... [staff are] more proactive in the services they provide.” Thus, one interpretation is that the ability to recognize and name both old and new leadership styles is less critical than the ability to describe the perceived impacts of the new style itself. Whether the participants were able to recognize the change, or articulate the two leadership styles, i.e., vertical before and shared after, the majority of responses did address specific behaviors and outcomes of the new leadership style. Based on the volume of confused responses compared to the volume of responses that clearly perceived a difference, participants did not need to be able to recognize or articulate the specifics of the leadership change in order to be able to recognize and articulate the impacts of the new shared leadership style on their own work. Thus, another interpretation is that management could be more clear about the intentional transition to the shared leadership style, and with an explicit understanding of the behaviors of shared leadership, the positive outcomes could achieve a more positive impact on the staff.

It is, however, clear from the data that the majority of perceptions about the shared leadership model being applied to this recruitment program were positive. Many data points illustrated improvements to staff morale and satisfaction as well as the program itself: “it motivates me” and “That must impact USM recruitment efforts positively.” While some of the negative perceptions can serve to drive further improvements: “necessary to cater to each community college differently.” Ultimately the ability to recognize and label the leadership style being utilized is less important to the staff in the admission office than the ability to point out the impacts of such leadership on those same staff members. In this case study, the impacts were mostly positive, and those that were not, did provide constructive feedback for the program itself.

Moving Forward

Given the findings of this exploratory research project, that a shared leadership model has a predominantly positive impact on staff, it would follow that the next step for the researcher would be to propose that the shared leadership model be piloted in more programs in the admission office. However, as discussed previously, one of the potential downfalls of shared leadership is the potential for its abuse as it could be used as a method through which to delegate administrative tasks (Lindhal, 2008). This abuse carries the further potential for downsizing middle-management level employees after administrative tasks have been delegated to lower level employees. Such downsizing could be disastrous for both the admission office as well as the staff members therein.

In a time when national demographics for traditionally-aged college students show a significant downward trend, universities are competing more than ever for applicants. The university in this study has chosen to pursue new markets in adult and transfer students as

opposed to continuing to compete for a shrinking population of 18-24 year-olds. The largest difference in recruitment efforts for these two populations is time investment. High school students may be recruited en-masse through efforts like college fairs and presentations in their local guidance office. Adult students and transfers, however, are becoming, in the words of one participant in this study: “more ‘savvy customers.’” Thus, they require a greater investment of time on behalf of the admission staff members to build relationships which should result in student applications.

If the shared leadership model were to be implemented as a method through which to downsize the staff, then the office would lose the human resources necessary to recruit the adult and transfer students it needs to help sustain the institution. As one can clearly see in this case, the shared leadership model actually *increased* the staff working on this program from one to three. If the researcher were to take the assumed next step in proposing a shared leadership model to his supervisors, then he must also make sure they intend to use it as a method through which decision making and enactment of programs may be distributed among the staff members, not as a justification for downsizing. Ideally the best way to do that would be to seek the input from the staff themselves as to which programs could best benefit from the application of a shared leadership model; as well as how to enact the transition to the new leadership style. This would assure the staff that downsizing is not an option as they have control over the transition process, and are not likely to downsize themselves.

As the university has been downsizing its own Human Resources and Professional Development departments for several years now, a culture of employees training each other has arisen. In this culture there arises another possibility for staff members who have had success applying a shared leadership model to their own programming. They could go outside the

admission office to other university offices and departments in order to train colleagues to coordinate their own transitions to a shared leadership model where appropriate and possible. This would not only improve their practice in training and facilitation, both skills necessary for good admission work; but also increase their perceived value from their peers and supervisors. These increases in necessary workplace skills and peer-value could also help prevent the potential for downsizing within the admission office staff.

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Appendix I

Consent Form and Survey

<https://snapsurvey.usm.maine.edu/snapwebhost/surveypreview.asp?k=136943082572>

Appendix II

Survey Questions

- How would you describe the management style of the "Transfer Student Interview Day" Program prior to 2009?
- How would you describe the management style of the "Transfer Student Interview Day" Program since 2009?
- What, if any, do you see as key differences in the management style of the "Transfer Student Interview Day" Program before and after 2009?
- When compared with the old style, how has this new management style impacted your day-to-day work with the program?

- When compared with the old style, how has this new management style impacted your communication with your colleagues at the university?
- When compared with the old style, how has this new management style impacted your communication with your external colleagues at the three partner community colleges?
- When compared with the old style, how has this new management style impacted the work flow in the Transfer Office?
- When compared with the old style, how has this new management style impacted the Transfer Counselors?
- When compared with the old style, how has the new style impacted your job satisfaction?
- When compared with the old style, how has the new style impacted your motivation?
- When compared with the old style, are there any other impacts on you?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with the researcher regarding the leadership of this program?

Appendix III

Horizontalized Data in Clusters, Grouped by Theme: Positive, Programmatic, or Negative

POSITIVE THEMES

INCREASES & IMPROVEMENTS

B: more transcript evaluations...

B: Since 2009, ...more proactive in the services they provide ...

E: Better overall satisfaction

B: recruitment efforts, which have become more proactive

B: more face-to-face time,

B: more leeway ...

B: ... more widely promoted...,

B: more student participants...

B: more visits...

B: students have become more "savvy customers"

E: Improved

B: faster decisions on transfer applicants

G: continue to find ways to improve the service we provide.

B: That must impact USM recruitment efforts positively.

B: strengthening...

COMMUNICATION

B: lines of communication have been more utilized

B: ...Communication is often ongoing and consistent

E: a bit more of an open communication

G: If I know of new courses being offered or if there are changes to course equivalents, I update the system and notify the transfer counselors as quickly as possible.

G: I communicate updates to equivalents to the appropriate people as much as possible.

A: Responsive

CLARITY

E: very good and clear with expectations

B: clearer sense of where applicants are in the application cycle.

E: Things are clearer now.

EASE

C: easier, despite the differences.

G: Unofficial Evaluations are now scanned and stored on a common drive, in addition to being stored in a physical file. It's one extra step in the work flow, but well worth the effort.

G: Transfer Counselors are now able to find some of the more current unofficial evaluations on the common drive. This is especially helpful when working off-site.

B: ease the transition

RELATIONSHIPS

A: I know that I have people I can turn to with any unusual situations and people who will always be pleased to have students referred to them...

B: stronger relationship building with constituents.

E: Gives me more connection with students,

B: benefitting from a consistent relationship,

A: grounded in more of a professional relationship...

C: This should be viewed as a partnership between the two systems.

E: Collaborative with come[sic, some?], direct with others

G: but I do want things to work well for all members of the Transfer Team.

A: cooperative,

A: while on site, these individuals are engaging, energetic and represent well

SUPPORTIVE

A: supportive,

A: direct support from specific individuals assigned to visit campus and assist ...students is much appreciated.

G: I am motivated to support new initiatives recommended by my colleagues.

E: it motivates me

FLEXIBLE

B: demonstrated flexibility of scheduling...

B: more flexible in scheduling.

B: personnel who are able to visit more frequently makes it more feasible to arrange for students to meet ...

G: tried to be as accommodating as possible by offering many Transfer Student Interview Days. set up an appointment for [other options to meet].

A: accessible.

CONSISTENCY

C: it has helped to have a bit more consistent staffing.

B: greater consistency of visits,

PROGRAMMING THEMES

CURRENT

B: Visits scheduled like invited events...

B: visits... designed to give a one-on-one opportunity... to meet..., discuss..., and review..., with advising.

B: provided advising...

C: Differences include reminding students about their interview appointments a day or two before and helping the student prepare prior to an appointment.

B: Transfer students are a valuable commodity ..., as proven students, ...

B: the interview day is a small piece of a full complement of services ...

C: two of the community colleges are mirroring one another's programs more than in the past.

G: ...fairly well organized... transfer counselors are well prepared ... ready to work with students

RECOMMENDED

B: ... important for... personnel serving transfer students be available to them, able to travel to community colleges, and dedicate the greatest percentage of job responsibilities to the transfer population. ...

B: doing transfer programming once [students arrive]... on campus,

B: ... imperative that... personnel provide ... degree audits and advising

C: programs need to be geared toward the student populations at each of the community colleges...

B: special transfer orientations.

NEGATIVE THEMES**SMALL**

B smaller in scope...

B: , fewer student participants...

B: was less frequent

D: ... since mid-Fall 2011. It has gone through some iterations with a Graduate Assistant on campus weekly and some extra programming to now just a few visits a semester.

DIFFERENT

C: Each administered... differently.

C: ...continue to differ...

C: necessary to cater to each community college differently. ...

C: Each institution has its idiosyncrasies.

D: did not... [exist] until the Fall of 2012.

B: Prior to 2009, ...an invitation basis.

CONFUSION

D: I'm not sure what you're asking in "management style"?

B: Hard to determine.

B: Communication with external colleagues has increased over the years, but due to other factors not related to USM management style.

D: I'm not sure what new management style is being referred to.

DIFFICULTY

C: There are times when it appears that the receiving institution carries the brunt of the responsibility for these efforts.

C: there seems to be resistance...

NO CHANGE

C: I don't see any difference.

C: There doesn't appear to be any difference in work flow.

C: Again, I don't see a huge change in either management styles or communication flow...

C: It has not affected my job satisfaction.

C: There is no difference in my motivation

G: No direct impacts,