Bridging the Gap: A Study to Determine Competencies Necessary for Community College Deans to Manage and Lead Former Colleagues

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine competencies and leadership behaviors of ten academic deans in one community college district that supervise faculty in the same division in which they previously taught—and to create a competency model for effective deans in this situation. These competencies illustrate a skill set community college deans need to successfully manage and lead their former colleagues. This study’s grounded theory, qualitative methodology incorporated individual interviews, a focus group, and two questionnaires. Analysis of this data determined the advantages as well as the challenges faced by community college deans when faced with supervising, managing, and leading colleagues from the same division in which they taught and what competencies increase their chances to succeed in this circumstance. The study answered the questions of how close familiarity with the faculty impacts the dean’s job, how competencies for deans in this situation fit in the context of the American Association of Community College’s (AACC) Competencies for Community College Leaders (2005) and other competencies mentioned in the literature, and how faculty aspiring to a dean position can best prepare for a transition into that role. Results revealed that the deans rely on 11 competencies; of those, three—communication, collaboration, and professionalism—are central and are related to the other eight competencies. All the competencies were presented in the context of challenges that deans face in their position.
Results also revealed four kinds of preparation for faculty considering a move into a dean position: preparing psychologically, getting experience, knowing what they are getting into, and having a plan.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Community college academic deans are arguably the administrators closest to the classroom and interaction between faculty and students, which is the primary focus of education in our two-year institutions. Frequently, academic deans come to their positions directly from the faculty. One year they are teaching and involving themselves in faculty issues; the next they are at a desk all day long, fielding student complaints and organizing faculty evaluations. Whereas before they sat at Faculty Senate meetings, now they attend Managers’ Council—part of a different professional environment. Now they manage budgets. Now they have administrative assistants and other staff. Now they have facilities to manage. Now they are no longer faculty, no longer part of the noble profession of teaching.

Part of the difficulty for these transitioning deans is simply fact that they are in an in-between position. Jensen and Giles (2006) state that “when you’re an administrator, you are caught in some ways between faculty and top administration. You may be held accountable for your decisions but may not be given authority or power to solve problems. You have to live with, adjust to, and struggle against a bureaucratic structure nearly every day. You also must learn to say the single most horrible and spine-chilling two letter word in the English language: No” (p. 3). That two-letter word can be even more difficult to deliver if the new academic dean has to say it to colleagues who were only recently faculty peers. Reed (2013) also emphasizes the challenge of this in-
between position for community college deans, saying, “In a community college setting, deans (or associate deans, depending on the context) are in a difficult position. They don’t set macro policies, which come instead from the president, the board, or both. But they’re identified by the faculty as part of the administration, so any animus toward any given policy will get directed their way, whether they agree with the policy or not” (p. 4).

Foster (2006) explains this in-between position in a slightly different way, attributing a transitioning dean’s lack of understanding about the position’s roles and pressures to what he referred to as two different organizations that exist on college campuses, one academic and one administrative (p. 49-50). In the academic organization, Foster notes, an instructor’s focus is on the particular program in which he or she exists (teaching or research), but in the administrative organization, the focus must be broader; it must be institutional (2006, p. 50). This positioning, between the faculty and higher-level administrators, is critical for understanding the dean position.

Studying community college academic deans is increasingly important given the significance of the position (its closeness to the teaching and supporting that central endeavor) coupled with the current difficulty of recruiting people for these jobs. This study focused on community college academic deans with the understanding that such a position is frequently called “department chair” in other institutions. In the present study, the focus was on a position that is administrative, in direct supervision of faculty, but a non-teaching position itself.
The Research Problem

Community college deans who have come into their position directly from a faculty position—especially within their own department or division—do so frequently without a clear understanding of the job’s pressures, the social/political environment that makes functioning in the position difficult (Foster, 2006, pp. 50-51; Thomas & Schuh, 2004, p. 13). Often they are unaware of what traits or competencies will allow them to succeed while they learn how to respond to higher level administrators and simultaneously redevelop their relationship with faculty and staff (Foster, 2006, p. 52; Spangler, 1999, p. 22). These competencies—a combination of knowledge, behavior, and abilities for the job—may be out of the realm of faculty experience or education. Gmelch, Wolverton, Wolverton, and Sarros (1999) point out, “Few deans receive basic training in management so that they can transcend the ‘administtrivia’ and focus on vital issues” (p. 736). Also, although entry-level administrators may previously have held faculty leadership roles, they often lack managerial experience. Caroll and Wolverton (2004) say that these positions are “handled by people who were not necessarily leaders in a previous role; without, for the most part, any previous managerial experience...” (p. 8). Gmelch (2004) concurs about this lack of experience and training: “Academic leaders typically come to their positions without leadership training, without prior executive experience, without a clear understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of their roles, without recognition of the metamorphic changes that occur as one transforms from an academic to an academic leader, and without an awareness of the cost to their academic and personal lives” (p. 74). McCarthy (2003) adds that new administrators who have
come out of faculty ranks do so unprepared and with little or no formal training or preparation for their jobs (p. 40).

This difference in focus that Foster (2006) mentions, one academic and one administrative, creates stress for new deans because their focus must change and they must supervise faculty who still have a programmatic view and don’t understand that “the academic and administrative organizations operate on very different principles” (p. 52). Sometimes this divergence in perspective shows in a lack of trust for the new administrator; sometimes the new administrator’s words and opinions carry far more weight than they ever would have previously (Palm, 2006, p. 60). A related aspect to this research problem is that community colleges have not found a wealth of strong applicants for their academic dean positions. Reed (2013) notes, “Unsurprisingly, finding acceptable and capable candidates who are willing to give up tenure, union protections, summer vacations, four-day schedules, and casual dress codes for remarkably small pay increases and jobs that offer responsibility without authority is often an uphill battle” (p. 4). While the community college dean is in a challenging position between faculty and other administrators, just getting faculty to apply for an open dean position can be quite difficult.

The literature surrounding this topic includes several studies that discuss the transition from faculty to dean (or department chair) and that this is a shift in identity that causes stress and role ambiguity for the individual (Burns and Gmelch, 1992; Wild, Ebbers, Shelley, & Gmelch, 2003; Griffith, 2006; Reed, 2013). Other studies refer to the price (social, family) one pays in becoming a dean or department chair (Bailey, 2008;
Gmelch, 1991; Griffith 2006). Still others point to the critical relationship between the dean/chair and the faculty (Moye, Henkin, & Floyd, 2006; Miller, 1999; Andrews, 2000; McArthur, 2002; Reed, 2013). Perhaps the most prevalent body of literature is focused on what the dean’s position is, how individuals should be doing the job well—traits and competencies for the position. This includes a central set of competencies for community college administrators from the AACC (2005) that function as part of the conceptual framework for this study.

Overall, the literature covers what deans/department chairs do, competencies for good performance in their jobs, stresses they experience in their positions, personal and professional costs involved in taking their positions, and the importance of the relationship between dean/chair and faculty. However, there has not been an in-depth exploration of the particular challenges deans/chairs experience when they supervise those who used to be their peers nor of the competencies of those who perform best in this situation. Given that deans often come to their positions directly from the faculty and frequently supervise those very people, a study of this kind provides valuable information for those already in the position, for faculty considering a move to administration, and for other administrators who work with those at the dean level.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the competencies and leadership behaviors of ten academic deans in XYZ Community College District that supervise faculty in the same division in which they previously taught—and to create a competency model for supervising, leading, and managing former colleagues. These
competencies would illustrate a set of skills, knowledge, and abilities community college deans must have to manage and lead their former colleagues.

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

**Central research question.** What are the advantages as well as the challenges faced by community college deans when supervising, managing, and leading colleagues from the same division in which they taught, and what competencies increase their chances to succeed in this circumstance?

**Subquestions.**

- How is the dean’s job impacted by close familiarity with the faculty?
- How do the deans’ competencies in this situation fit in the context of the AACC’s Competencies for Community College Leaders?
- What other competencies do successful deans in this situation exhibit?
- How would a faculty member, aspiring to lead, best prepare for such a role?

**Conceptual Framework**

This study of community college deans supervising faculty who were former peers was conducted within the conceptual framework of (a) the traits and competencies of successful deans and department chairs as revealed in the literature, (b) the particular competencies set out by the American Association of Community Colleges, and (c) the challenges and stresses deans and chairs experience transitioning to and working in their positions. Figure 1 illustrates this conceptual framework.
The model that has emerged from the qualitative data in this study illustrates the particular subset of competencies for the deans in relation to their position between faculty (the former peers they now supervise) and higher-level administrators and alongside the AACC Competencies for Community College Administrators. The model also suggests strategies for faculty preparing for a career shift into the dean position.

**Significance of the Study**

**Contributions to research and literature in the field.** The community college academic dean position, like low-to-middle management positions at other colleges and universities, is critical to the success of the institution. The dean’s closeness to both the fundamental activity of teaching and the higher-level decision making of senior
administrators, positions him or her in a place of significant influence. Additionally, many who take their first administrative position do so in the very department in which they served as faculty. This study, which explores that unique position and model of competencies of those who succeed in it, adds to the research and literature in the field. The existing literature has addressed competencies of deans and department chairs overall, that the dean/faculty relationship is very important, that a dean’s life is stressful, and that transitioning into such a position is difficult. However, little has been written about community college deans who supervise their former peers. A specific model of competencies for deans in this situation does not exist. This study adds to the research base by synthesizing the existing literature on perceived competencies for community college deans and adding to it a new model of competencies for those deans who are in the unique (but not rare) position of supervising their former peers. Another practical component is a synthesis of strategies for faculty who are considering a move into the dean position. A particular context is the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders (2005), a detailed and well-known set of competencies upon which to compare, contrast, and contextualize the competencies derived from the data in this study. This research is significant in that it addresses a professional/social phenomenon that can influence an academic dean’s performance and job satisfaction and thus the effectiveness of the people and programs in the dean’s area.

Who will benefit? Who will be interested? This study is especially pertinent for administrators in the California Community College system and in community colleges and other colleges and universities across the country, who recognize the difficulty of
recruiting and hiring new entry-level administrators/deans, who are interested in the effectiveness of those entry-level administrators, and who supervise deans in this position. The study is also pertinent for community college and other faculty who may be considering a move into administration and who would appreciate a clearer understanding (an inside look, so to speak) of the competencies required to do the job well and of the challenges of supervising those who used to be peers. The transition from a faculty position into an entry level administrative position can be especially difficult; the strategies for making that transition that come as a result of this study will be helpful for those considering such a professional change. Additionally, this study is pertinent for those who are already in dean/chair positions who will want to know what others in the same position are experiencing and what competencies have allowed them to succeed.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Primary Source: The AACC Competencies

In studying community college deans supervising their former faculty peers, a central source and a major context for the current study was the AACC’s Competencies for Community College Leaders (2005). The major competency categories in this document are Organizational Strategy (p. 4), Resource Management (p. 4), Communication (p. 5), Collaboration (p. 5), Community College Advocacy (p. 6), and Professionalism (p. 6). These broad proficiencies are explained in one sentence in the document and clarified with illustrations that provide particular activities for each. For instance, “Community College Advocacy” is followed by the explanation, “An effective community college leader understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission, vision, and goals of the community college” (2005, p. 6). This explanation is followed by a list of six activities that includes, for example, “Value and promote diversity, inclusion, equity, and academic excellence,” “Advocate the community college mission to all constituents and empower them to do the same,” and “Advance lifelong learning and support a learner-centered and learning-centered environment” (2005, p.6). Thus, each competency is explained in detail, providing a rich base upon which to measure and compare competencies presented by other authors and sources in the field. The AACC document including cover page, introduction, and list of community college leaders
involved in creating the competencies is eight pages long, so Wallin’s (2012) summary is useful:

1. **Organizational strategy**—strategically improves quality, protects long-term health, promotes success of students, and sustains the community college mission.

2. **Resource Management**—equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, information, and physical and financial assets.

3. **Communication**—uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and community.

4. **Collaboration**—develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, ethical, and mutually beneficial internal and external relationships.

5. **Community college advocacy**—understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission of the community college.

6. **Professionalism**—works ethically to set high standards for self and others. (pp. 22-23)

Given the length and complexity of the AACC Competencies document, this summary is helpful as a quick-glance list that conveys the major concepts of the competencies without the in-depth illustration.

The AACC leadership competencies were designed to be more than a reference document. Ottenritter (2012) explains that one “driver regarding the creation of the competencies that emerged over time was the lack of not only a cohesive curriculum for aspiring community college leaders, but also of formal leadership training for those currently leading community colleges” (p. 8). Indeed, the American Association of Community Colleges researched and designed these competencies as a framework for curriculum that would address the special challenges leaders in community colleges face
(Wallin, 2012, p. 27). In particular, the competencies have been used as the basis of curriculum for the Future Leaders Institute and Future Leaders Institute/Advanced offered by AACC (Wallin, 2012, p. 20). Further, though, the document itself refers to a multi-faceted purpose: “The framework has wide utility for both individuals and institutions. It helps emerging leaders chart their personal leadership development progress. It provides program developers with curricular guidelines. Institutionally, it informs human resources departments with direction for staff recruitment, hiring, rewards, and professional development” (AACC, 2005, p.2). As one can see, the vision for the document was ambitious; it was to be influential for our country’s two-year colleges.

Generally, the AACC competencies have been held in high regard by scholars who refer to them; some authors have tailored the competencies to an evolving community college climate. Boggs (2012) mentions specific competencies of the six that are needed to address particularly recent challenges to community colleges. He notes that resource management, communication, and advocacy are especially important in leading during the economic downturn that began in 2007 (p. 98-99); that organizational strategy, collaboration, communication, and resource management are key competencies in addressing the national shift “to a focus on student learning rather than on delivering instruction” (p. 100); that communication, resource management, and communication are three important competencies in addressing our colleges’ increased demand for accountability in resource use and student outcomes (pp. 101-102); and that communication and advocacy are instrumental in being able to lead in an era of increased
importance in global education (pp. 102-103). These direct applications of the AACC competencies all respond to recent or emerging conditions for community college leaders, conditions changing in response to both internal and external environments. Thus, part of the value of the AACC document is that it is comprehensive and adaptable to the varied and changing community college environments found throughout the country.

Themes from the Literature

Necessary traits and competencies. The AACC competencies are a significant part of one central theme that one can find in a review of the major bodies of research, that certain traits or competencies are necessary to succeed in the dean position. A number of authors allude to the AACC competencies, regardless of the degree to which they agree with them. McNair (2010) responds to the AACC competencies in her study that surveys California community college leaders about which of those competencies they believe are most important and which can be achieved through doctoral studies (p. 202). This quantitative study of leaders in California’s community college system uses a survey that determined the six AACC competencies were all deemed important by respondents. However, the level of importance given the six competencies varied by competency. Organizational strategy, communication, and collaboration received nearly unanimous responses that those were key competencies (pp. 208-10). On the other hand, resource management, community college advocacy, and professionalism—while considered important overall—each had particular aspects to which respondents agreed less strongly (pp. 208-10). Overall, the McNair study reinforced the AACC
competencies because, as she notes, the competencies are difficult to disagree with (2010, p. 210).

However, not all authors writing about the AACC document profess equal acceptance of the competencies. Eddy (2012) also responds directly to the AACC document in proposing a somewhat different version of the competencies in which the relationships and connections between the competencies are central (pp. 29-39). She argues for a model of four “holistic competencies”: inclusivity, framing meaning, attention to the bottom line, and systems thinking (2012, pp. 33-36). Each holistic competency is built upon an underlying combination of at least two of the original six AACC competencies (Eddy, 2012, p. 37). Eddy explains, for example, “Undergirding the cluster of framing meaning are competencies in organizational strategy, communication, collaboration, and advocacy” (2012, p. 34). Also, key to Eddy’s model is one overarching competency that she argues was missing from the original six from AACC, what she refers to as “contextual competency” (2012, p. 32). This she defines as “understanding the college culture and reading the context of what is valued” (2012, p. 32). She explains that contextual competency is interwoven with each of her other holistic competencies and is of great value to leaders especially when they first start working at a college: “Leaders who possessed a competency for reading and interpreting the campus context and culture hit the ground running. In part, acknowledging and recognizing campus traditions and history helped to engage the campus in change” (Eddy, 2012, p. 32). This reorganization and clustering of the original AACC document allows the six competencies to be conceived of in a different way and within the scope of
a new competency that is all about understanding college culture. Her focus on a competency that is especially helpful for new administrators is important, too, since the transition into a first administrative position (usually at the dean level) is often especially challenging.

McNair and Phelan (2012) also argue that the original six AACC competencies are incomplete. Focusing on the future-oriented competencies, they studied six current presidents who suggested that “entrepreneurial thinking about the future; commitment to diversity and equity; and taking a systems perspective” were competencies that community college leaders (specifically executive leaders) should possess (p. 92). Even more specifically, the presidents in this study emphasized “visioning or scenario planning skills,” “willingness to take risks and challenge assumptions,” and “demonstrating an obligation for student success” (McNair & Phelan, 2012, p. 92). Like Eddy (2012), McNair and Phelan value the AACC competencies but also believe that, as formulated in 2005, they fall short of being complete in describing what is necessary for community college leaders. Even so, one can see how the AACC competencies have been very influential as a basis of skills and attributes that can buoy community college leaders at all levels.

However, other sources stress competencies unrelated to those put forth by ACCC. Bassoppo-Moyo and Townsend (1997), for example, analyze “professional competencies” and “professional attitudes” and utilize a grounded-theory approach to isolate competencies such as “conceptual competence” and “adaptive competence” and attitudes such as “scholarly concern for improvement” and “motivation for continued
learning” (pp. 42-44). There are some similarities here to competencies mentioned by Alfred (2012) that address the new reality for community colleges of having to produce more and better outcomes with fewer resources (p. 110). Alfred lists “visioning and optimization,” “inventiveness,” “relating and inclusiveness,” “simplicity,” “identifying and developing talent,” and “creating and maintaining a sense of urgency” (pp. 117-18) as competencies community college leaders will need to accomplish the very challenging task of leveraging scarce resources to accomplish greater outcomes (p. 117), a task that is increasingly what community college leaders will face.

In contrast, Findlen (2000) emphasizes very concrete competencies and says that community college instructional deans need to have (or need to have access to) a certain body of knowledge that will enable them to be effective in their position. In particular, he recommends that deans need knowledge about faculty evaluation, sexual harassment, Americans with Disabilities Act, discipline and termination, copyright, student privacy, student discipline, and general legal resources (pp. 88-94). In contrast to other sets of competencies, these are focused more on content rather than skill: what rather than how.

Overall, a significant portion of the literature on this topic was centered on the traits or competencies for successful leadership. The AACC competencies, coming from a major professional organization for two-year colleges, provide a context for much of what has been written since their development in 2005. Not all of the literature about competencies is focused directly the community college dean position. Some is focused on administrative leadership in general, some on executive leadership, and some on competencies for deans in particular. In any case, the competencies discussed in the
literature provide a major thread for contextualizing the focus of this study of community college deans who supervise faculty with whom they had once been peers.

**The stressful transition from faculty to dean.** Another theme in the literature is that the transition from faculty to dean or department chair can be difficult and stressful. A number of factors can contribute to this stress. Griffith (2006) mentions that the relationship with former peers can be difficult because “they inevitably come to view their former colleagues as administrators, not as fellow faculty members” (p. 68). This change in perception of the new dean contributes to the dean’s internal struggle because it forces him or her to grapple with identity. McCarthy (2003) emphasizes the difficulty of this relationship in explaining that, in his own experience, when he transitioned from faculty to the dean’s job, some faculty suddenly lost trust in him (p. 43). He said, “Years of credibility can be forgotten overnight when we assume the title of dean” (McCarthy, 2003, p. 43). Having a certain degree of trust as a faculty peer and then suddenly losing it by virtue of changing positions is a shift that would seemingly create stress in most deans.

Wolverton, Wolverton, and Gmelch (1999) emphasize the “in-between” position for the academic dean as being about “role conflict” (for instance, being asked to both support and evaluate faculty) and “role ambiguity” (having insufficient or ambiguous information with which to perform tasks) (p. 82). These authors found a significant relationship (19% of the variance) between role conflict and role ambiguity and the level of stress of the deans they surveyed (Wolverton et al., 1999, p. 88). This is related to the shift in relationship and changed identity mentioned above, but here the focus is more on
what the dean does and what roles this person plays in day-to-day activities at the college. Gmelch, Wolverton, Wolverton, and Sarros (1999) further explain this role conflict by pointing out that academic deans’ “academic interests turn them firmly toward their departments, but their leadership of the colleges and schools depends largely on directions from the provost and university” (p. 718). The question becomes a matter of whom or what the dean represents. These authors mention that deans experience “burnout” as a result of the tension from trying to be effective administrators in support of the whole institution while simultaneously protecting the academic interests of the department (p. 718). Therefore, the difficulty can be that a dean feels a need to represent both the whole institution as well as the academic department. Gmelch et al. (1999) use a quantitative study to categorize the top ten stressors for deans by dimension (p. 732). They illustrate that for U.S. deans, four stress variables, “attending too many meetings, having too heavy a work load, experiencing frequent interruptions, and meeting report deadlines, loaded on the administrative task (AT) stress dimension” (p. 732). Two variables—“handling faculty conflicts and making tenure and promotion decisions—loaded on faculty/chair-related stress” (p. 732). One variable—“Attempting to balance my professional and private lives—loaded on time/personal (TP) stress” (p. 732). Another—“having insufficient time to stay current in my academic field—loaded on scholarship (S) stress” (p. 732). One more—“trying to gain financial support for college programs—loaded on fund-raising (FR) stress” (p. 732). A final stressor—“holding excessively high self-expectations—is a unique variable that has the potential to impact all stress dimensions” (p. 732). Analyzing these variables and the stress dimensions to
which the variables lead can help to explain the kinds of stress deans feel and also the causes of the stress. Some of these stress dimensions can be combined for categories described in slightly different ways. For instance, the “administrative task (AT) stress dimension” (Wolverton et al., 1999, p. 732), meaning too many meetings and too heavy a workload, can be combined with “scholarship (S) stress” (p. 732), not getting an opportunity to pursue one’s scholarship, in an overall category of stress related to lack of time and feeling overwhelmed. Other stress dimensions might be grouped into a stress category related to relationship in the position and yet others to tasks in the position.

The Wolverton et al. (1999) study samples academic deans at Research I & II and Doctoral I & II; Masters I & II; and Baccalaureate I & II institutions. One might wonder about the relationship between role conflict and role ambiguity for academic deans in community colleges, where it is common for those in a dean’s position to have risen directly from the faculty ranks. Wild, Ebbers, Shelley, and Gmelch (2003) research stress in deans with a quantitative study of academic deans at AACC schools who had taken The 2000 National Survey of Community and Technical College Academic Deans (p. 5). This study confirms nine stress factors for community college deans: managing human interactions, intrinsic job demands, managing professional/personal life, role strain, balancing leadership and scholarship, fiscal responsibilities, external constituency demands, administrative identity, and professional maturity (p.18). These authors note, “Deans are likely to have been faculty members at some time in their career and therefore fully understand the concerns of faculty. This close affiliation and understanding of the faculty role likely adds to the stress of conflicts with this group” (p. 12). This suggests
that the dean’s knowledge of what the faculty are experiencing and their emotional and intellectual responses to what happens within the department, within the institution, and outside of the college can create pressure that the dean has to learn to live with.

Bedeian (2002) adds an interesting insight as to the sources of stress for those in the dean position, indicating that the stress can be a result of internal struggles. He refers to this as “the dean’s disease” and argues that upon taking office, academic deans will first experience positive feelings and gratefulness for the confidence colleagues have put in them but then will quickly experience “the metamorphic effects of power” that make them more interested in maintaining their own power, resulting in ineffective self-serving leadership and a poor relationship with faculty (p. 164-166). This is a negative take on the dean’s shift in identity, but, regardless, it is another interpretation of the phenomenon of the dean moving into his or her new role and experiencing stress as a result of having to learn new responsibilities and having to establish and re-establish relationships.

**Personal and professional price for becoming a dean.** A related theme from the literature is that community college deans pay a personal and professional price for moving into their positions. Bailey (2008) provides a qualitative study based on role theory to reveal strategies community college deans use to balance their work and home lives (p. 782). Gmelch (1991) argues that one of the major tradeoffs for faculty assuming a department chair position is the loss of time—less time for professional activity and teaching and less time for personal interests, resulting in dissatisfaction in personal and professional life (pp. 3-4). The stress that often is evident in the transition phase from faculty to dean settles in and becomes an ongoing stress throughout the dean’s tenure in
the position. As Gmelch et al. (1999) note, this stress is often related to the conflicting forces of trying to protect the autonomy of faculty while at the same time trying to be an effective administrator (p. 718). They suggest that while it is possible for deans to “sustain life on the edge” for limited periods of time, inevitably deans will need to seek balance in their lives (Gmelch et al., 1999, p. 737).

The personal price for becoming a dean is also related to the issue of personal versus public life. Gmelch (2004) notes, “We cannot ensure a decent amount of personal privacy for chairs since they are public servant leaders every moment of their day, with every appointment, message, and memo open to public scrutiny, critique, comment, and review” (p. 70). The decision to become a chair or dean comes with a decision about whether one wants or is willing to become a more public person. Generally, faculty considering a move to an administrative role have some awareness of such a shift, but they may not have an awareness of the implications on one’s home life. Gmelch (2004) states, “Even at home, academics find that leadership is not a ‘family-friendly’ profession. Thus, most academics are not willing to give up their professional and personal lives...” (p. 70).

Related to the issue of balancing public and private life is the struggle for deans to comprehend meaning in their work. There can be a psychological cost to working in the position. Mills (2006) contends that in the second half of life people begin to look internally (compared to the first half of life) for meaning and satisfaction (p. 294). This is the period in which some faculty may transition to administration or deans may look for advancement. Mills argues that this is the time at which administrators—despite having
been previously successful as professors—may question how successful they’ve been, and that the solution is to make a shift away from a focus on success to a focus on servant leadership and meaning (2006, pp. 301-302). At this point deans may be asking why they’re spending so much time at work, whether their long hours and efforts at work are paying off, and whether they might need to be spending more time on their private lives.

Yet another factor affects the personal price of being a dean, the amount of time it takes not only for the regular duties of the job but also for the ceremonial appearances that may be expected, if not required. Reed (2013) notes, “In my own case, I find that the stretch from mid-April to graduation is almost comically overstuffed with evening events: end-of-year celebrations, performances, galas, thank-you dinners, and the like” (p. 121). He mentions that frequently there is a cost of not attending an event when invited, especially if one’s predecessor went to all events and set that precedent (2013, p. 122). These pressures, both of time and expectation, can create stress in a dean’s personal life. Added to the loss of private time overall and, at least for some, the questioning of meaning or purpose in one’s work, the price for someone in this position can be substantial, necessitating efforts to balance home and work.

**Importance of dean/faculty relationship.** A fourth theme revealed in the literature concerns the importance of the dean/faculty relationship. This is a key relationship since the dean is the administrator that works most closely with the faculty and is the one to whom the faculty look for answers to questions and solutions to problems. Andrews (2000), for instance, discusses this key relationship in articulating the responsibilities a dean has in relation to faculty and even claims, “Excellence in
classroom teaching is undoubtedly the most important prerequisite for a person in this position” (pp. 19-20). This suggests that a strong teaching record would help create for the dean a sense of confidence or trust by faculty based on the notion that the dean knows what they are experiencing. In fact, this element of trust is part of a short list of competencies Andrews lays out for the dean position: “The dean must be competent, trusted, consistent, have integrity, and have the ability to solve problems” (2000, p.26). The relationship faculty have with the dean is influenced by both the fact that the dean used to work in the classroom and the fact that he or she now has a higher level of responsibility and opportunity for influencing the instructional (and sometimes research) work the faculty do. Noting the importance of the dean-faculty relationship, Bray (2008) contends that a dean’s effectiveness is a matter of perception—the faculty’s perception. Bray notes, “In short, faculty hold perceptions of how academic administrators should behave, to which topics they should give attention, and how much they should involve faculty in decision making. To the extent that administrators meet faculty expectations, faculty will view the administrator as effective” (2008, p. 694). This is a valuable perspective on effectiveness; indeed, for the dean who has just transitioned from a faculty position, it may be very important. However, the dean does not answer to the faculty alone. Still, in Bray’s quantitative study of these faculty perceptions, several important norms became evident. First, there were what the faculty that Bray surveyed considered “high crimes,” these including “Inept Evaluation and Representation, Failure to Communicate, Fiscal Intemperance, and Regulatory Disdain” (p. 701). Bray’s “minor felonies” included “Unconveyed Expectations, Undermining Faculty Control, Bending to
Pressure, and finally being Publicly Critical” (p. 703). Bray’s “misdemeanor norms” were “Devaluing Nonacademic Staff, Disdain for Faculty Input, and Visionary Incoherence” (p. 706). Bray’s study is illustrative of faculty thinking about administrative behavior or success in negative terms, what faculty members want their dean not to do. Though they come from a faculty perspective, most of these offenses (high crimes or misdemeanors) are likely what the deans themselves or higher-level administrators would also consider bad practice. If discussed from a positive perspective, these findings suggest that the faculty would want a responsive, communicating, responsible, and competent dean. In situations in which the dean has come from the faculty, this might mean the faculty want that person not to change, not to become a new person, to remain the same.

The importance of the dean/faculty relationship is discussed by McArthur (2002) in his analysis of the department chair position, which he describes as the entry-level administrative position in most ways equivalent to a dean. McArthur emphasizes a collaborative role for the chair (pp. 2-3), stating that chairs must have support from department faculty in order to lead successfully (p. 4). McArthur notes, “The reality is that faculty can be a force of resistance or a wonderful repository of creative energy. Which direction they take is due in large part to the leadership exhibited by the chair” (2002, p. 6). This position has its roots in the long and strong history of shared governance in higher education and the expectation by faculty that they will be involved in the running of the college. Birnbaum and Eckel (2005) explain that increasingly, since World War II, faculty have “claimed for themselves the right not only to make decisions
concerning the major educational activities of the institution but also to participate fully in setting institutional policy and to have a voice in its management” (p. 341). The exact culture of shared governance and how it manifests itself will differ from college to college, but the very presence of this culture certainly affects a dean’s or chair’s relationship with the faculty and raises that relationship to prominent importance. This leads to the next theme in the literature.

**Dean and faculty differing perspectives on decision making and governance.** 
A last theme from the literature concerns the very different (sometimes opposing) perspectives on decision-making and governance that faculty and deans have. Foster (2006) goes so far as to say that a college has two different organizations, one academic and one administrative, the former a creative and program-focused perspective, the latter an institutional perspective (pp. 49-50). Similar to Foster’s two different organizations, Gallos (2002), in discussing the different expectations for those in the dean position, explains that a dean’s life is governed by an internal world and an external world. The internal world, one in which the dean interacts with faculty, has expectations of “minimal intrusion, maximum support, and unwavering promotion of faculty freedoms and differences” (para. 16). Good deans in this internal world “foster an internal school environment characterized by informal and nonhierarchical relationships. They sustain their scholarship and strong academic credentials. The collegial dean is an encouraging buddy with a bottomless purse and good list of current publications” (para. 16). In contrast, in the external dean’s world, “expectations for deans are markedly different from internal demands for collegiality, support, and minimum intrusion. Externally,
deans are held accountable for two main outcomes: the timely delivery of quality goods and relevant services, and the sound management of their academic units” (para. 31). Gallos explained further that the external world is influenced by the managerial culture of the institution, which is focused on such concerns educational outcomes, planning, goal-setting, and budgeting—and which is “legal-rational” (2002, para. 32). One can see that these are very different ways of perceiving the job, and the difficulty is that they can conflict with one another. The very language Gallos uses to describe these worlds is indicative of these different perceptions. The external world is described in much more business-like terms: “sound management” (para. 31), “outcomes” (para. 32), and “timely delivery of quality goods” (para. 31). The internal world is depicted with terms like “support” (para. 16), “freedoms” (para. 16), and “encouraging buddy” (para. 16). The two depictions would appear to be of completely different positions.

Palm (2006) mentions that moving into administration gives a person “a more comprehensive view of the institution” (p. 61). This can be positive thing, as Palm notes (p. 61), but it can also add to the difficulty of the position if the dean and faculty and their different perspectives lead to differing priorities and assumptions about how decision-making works. Gallos (2002) explains, “Faculty can miss the full scope and parameters of the dean’s job and remain largely unaware of what they do not know” (para. 7). She continues, “Academic administration has a different pace, focus, and rhythm from faculty life—and faculty largely attend to the pace, focus, and rhythms of their own professional and disciplinary domains. Deans communicate and inform, but the words mean little to those who bring different priorities and another lens to the viewing. And it is easy for
deans to get caught up in the hectic pace of overfilled schedules and assume that others recognize and appreciate all that they do” (Gallos, 2002, para. 10). This raises two aspects of the issue: the ability of faculty to understand the dean position given the very different world they live in and the willingness and/or time the dean takes in attempting to communicate the administrative/institutional world to the faculty. The responsibility for this lack of understanding would seem to be with both faculty and the dean—or with neither, depending on one’s view about the possibility of closing this gap in perspective. Importantly, Gallos warns, “And deans cannot favor one world over the other—even if the majority of their faculty wish they did” (2002, para. 6). Reed (2013) explains this concisely: “The essence of being a dean is knowing how to balance” (p. 70). He explains further, “A successful dean connects the collegewide issues with the concerns of the individual departments and faculty, and helps them work together in support of the college mission. Explaining and listening are major parts of the process” (Reed, 2013, p. 70). This goes back to the notion of the community college dean being in the middle, having to represent what can be very different interests simultaneously, a phenomenon made all the more difficult because a given issue and its environment can be viewed from two very different perspectives, one from faculty, the other from administration.

**Overview of the Literature**

The existing research includes both quantitative analysis of the dean’s position (Wild et al., 2003; Palm, 2006; McNair, 2010; Wolverton et al., 1999; Bray, 2008) and qualitative (Bailey, 2008; Bassoppo-Moyo & Townsend, 1997). The themes mentioned above illustrate both the complexity and challenges in the community college academic
dean position as well as the fact that a number of studies have explored competencies for the position and/or for community college administrators overall. While these themes are recognizable from a review of the literature, one will also notice connections between them. In discussing the stressful transition into the dean position, for example, one can see the connection between that theme and the theme that there is a personal and professional price deans pay for assuming their positions. The stress is related to the difficulty deans have in balancing their work and private lives and in the many demands on their time. Another link between themes is with 1) the importance of the dean/faculty relationship and 2) the differing perspectives on decision-making and governance that faculty and deans experience. The latter theme in this case necessitates the former. The relationship between faculty and deans would seem to be important because of the differing viewpoints on governance.

Furthermore, each theme in the literature links to or is implied in the AACC competencies document. For instance, the theme that there is a personal price deans pay for their work is implied by one illustration of professionalism in the AACC competencies: “Manage stress through self-care, balance, adaptability, flexibility and humor” (2005, p. 6). Likewise, the theme about the importance of the faculty/dean relationship is suggested by the AACC competencies of communication and collaboration (2005, p. 5). This is why the AACC competencies are a central source in the literature on this topic and why they take a prominent role in the conceptual framework for this study.
The literature does not, however, address the competencies required of community college academic deans supervising faculty who were formerly their peers. A qualitative study that explores in-depth experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions—as they are related to competencies—is useful information for this field. There is a need for such a study given that it is common for faculty to advance to the dean or department chair position within their own department or division.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Method, Design, Participants

To study the competencies of community college academic deans who have supervised faculty in the same division in which they have taught—and to create a competency model for deans in this situation—this qualitative research project used a grounded theory approach. A qualitative study allowed for in-depth research into the experiences and perceptions of the subjects, providing at the completion of the study a model of competencies and faculty-to-dean transition strategies that came from detailed data. The literature in this field includes both quantitative and qualitative studies. Broad-based studies on community college leadership competencies exist (AACC, 2005; McNair, 2010). An in-depth qualitative exploration using grounded theory was conceived to complement the existing literature and provide (a) insights into what kinds of competencies this particular population of community college deans (those who have transitioned into the position within the division in which they taught) utilize to navigate their positions and (b) best strategies for faculty who wish to make the transition into administration.

As a methodology, grounded theory began in the late 1960s when two sociologists at the University of California San Francisco Medical Center, Glaser and Strauss (1967), published The Discovery of Grounded Theory, in which they proposed
that sociologists had been overemphasizing the testing of theories and hypotheses (pp. 1-2). In contrast to other research methods, Glazer and Strauss stressed an inductive approach whereby a researcher works toward a theory through a process of data collection, discovering categories within the data, connecting categories, and forming a theory as a result (Creswell, 2008, pp. 432-33). In the decades following their initial development of grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss disagreed about the best version of the method, Strauss (along with his colleague Corbin) arguing for a straightforward, step-by-step procedure, Glaser positing that Strauss and Corbin had deviated from the original conceptual method (Hutchinson & Skodol Wilson, 2001, p. 210).

To develop a model of competencies for the deans in this study, a grounded theory method, with its inductive approach, utilized an in-depth analysis of interview, focus group, and questionnaire data to generate the model of competencies for the community college deans being studied, particularly as it relates to their unique position supervising faculty with whom they have taught as peers. Of the various grounded-theory designs, a systematic design (with some qualities of constructivist and emerging designs) was used. A systematic design, with its emphasis on coding based on initial categories (Creswell, 2008, p. 434), is appropriate given that some categories in this study will be related to the AACC Competencies for Community College Administrators (2005), a pre-determined set of qualities setting a framework for the qualities and eventual themes that emerge from the interview, focus-group, and questionnaire data. Another way of conceiving of the methodology for this grounded theory study is that it is grounded in a positivist theoretical stance, one that assumes the generation of a product in
the form of a theory or model rather than an interpretive stance that would focus more on a structure to understand the phenomenon in context (O’Connor, Netting, & Thomas, 2008, p. 40). This study was not meant to invalidate the AACC competencies or any of the other competencies mentioned in the literature review, nor was it meant to affirm them. Rather, the model that emerged in this study illustrates which of the AACC competencies and others are most critical for deans to successfully supervise their former peers. Also, the data suggest strategies for faculty who are contemplating a shift to the dean position.

The site for this study was one community college district in California, and the primary participants were ten deans, all of whom transitioned from faculty roles into their dean position in the same division in which they taught. Secondary participants were 50 faculty (50 sent a questionnaire with 16 responses) who are supervised by these ten deans and who were colleagues when the deans were teaching. The study incorporated purposeful sampling in order to target the deans and faculty that have this particular relationship. Given the experiences of these particular deans (ranging from two to twenty years of administrative experience), they offered a wide range and depth of information, experiences, and perspectives with which it was possible to see a theory (or model) of competencies emerge.

Data collection began in a series of steps, starting with an in-depth interview of each of the deans, followed by a focus-group interview of five deans together, and completed with two questionnaires: the first a follow-up questionnaire for the deans that isolated emerging aspects and features of the competency model, the second a brief
questionnaire for purposefully selected faculty supervised by these five deans to validate the AACC competencies and those competencies of the emerging model. In Step 1, prior to the in-depth interview, each dean was sent a copy of the AACC Competencies as well as a summary of the AACC document (Wallen, 2012, p. 22-23) and was asked to rank the six competencies in order of their perceived importance. This ranking set a context for the actual interview questions, some of which allowed respondents an opportunity to explore and reveal other, unprompted competencies. (See Appendix A for Interview Guide.) Interviews, ranging from 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes, were conducted in the offices of the participants and were audio recorded. After exchanging pleasantries and greetings and reviewing the consent form, deans were asked to respond to each interview question. Follow-up questions or probes were sometimes asked to encourage participants to elucidate more on a topic, to come back to the topic at hand, and/or to explore more about something the participant had said. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in the follow-up questionnaire. All were willing and/or eager to do so. In Step 2, the focus group interview, five of the ten original deans (chosen by convenience sampling given the difficulty of gathering all ten from several colleges at one time) came together in a small conference room at one of the colleges to answer questions and discuss tentative findings that came about in the individual interviews. Because this was an emergent design, the questions for the focus group (see Appendix B) were developed after the individual interviews. These questions explored further the tentative themes emerging from the interviews. The participating deans were asked fewer questions than in the individual
interviews to allow for multiple responses to each question and to encourage free discussion on the topics. Some questions were written in part to test the categories of data emerging from the individual interviews while other questions would allow for further—more open-ended—exploration related to the research questions of this study. The short questionnaire for deans in Step 3 (see Appendix C) gathered data related to main components of the competency model emerging from Steps 1 and 2. Again, since this was an emergent design, specific questions were developed after the focus group. The purpose was to fine-tune the emergent competency model. The other brief questionnaire (Appendix D) asked faculty to rank the AACC Competencies so their responses could be compared and contrasted with the deans’ responses. Other questions allowed the faculty to respond to questions related to making the transition from faculty to dean. Given small samples sizes, the questionnaires were not designed as quantitative features of the study; rather, they were a method of gathering specific follow-up data from the ten deans and the faculty to be coded and analyzed in a fashion similar to the coding and analyzing of the interview and focus group data and to be triangulated with the data from the interviews and focus group session. In this way, the questionnaires were used to fine-tune the emerging model of competencies and validate those competencies. The questionnaires also allowed the deans and the faculty to respond to the emerging model in relation to the AACC Competencies. Figure 2 illustrates the data gathering sequence.
This sequence of steps for collecting data was arranged so that the initial interview stage with its rich text, analyzed using the open and axial coding process described above, offered participants a generous opportunity to discuss the many aspects of being a community college dean and supervising former peers. Another option for sequencing the data collection would have been to start with the focus group (now the second stage) before moving onto the in-depth interviews, developing the interview protocol in response to the focus group. This sequence, however, would bring into play a risk related to focus-group meetings or conversations that are one-time events; that is, that the focus-group participants could veer off topic or focus on only limited parts of the topic, which in turn would limit how the questions in the interview protocol were developed. The advantage of starting with the ten interviews and following with a focus group discussion, the questions of which were developed out of the coding and analysis
from the stage one interviews, is that individual interviews offered open exploration and
the focus group became an opportunity for participants to explore in greater depth and
freedom the model of competencies that was beginning to emerge. Hesse-Biber and
Leavy (2011) note, “It is appropriate to follow up in-depth interviews with focus group
interviews to verify individual interview data, examine how individual responses differ in
a group setting, expose individual interviewees to the group dynamic as a means of
education or empowerment, and include larger populations that may not have been
available for in-depth interviews (p. 177). The first three of these reasons are particularly
applicable for this study. The questionnaires in the third stage of data gathering fine-
tuned the model even further, creating even greater validity.

As is typical in grounded-theory research, data analysis in this study began during
the process of data collection. Specifically, during the 10 stage-one personal interviews,
analysis of transcripts began after the first interview with a process of open coding. Each
interview was coded shortly after the interview was transcribed. The qualitative data
analysis software program HyperResearch was utilized for all coding. As the master list
of codes developed, growing larger with each interview, codes were sorted and analyzed.
After all ten interviews had been conducted and transcribed, data and existing codes were
re-coded using axial coding, the process of showing core categories in relation to context,
causal conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. In short, it was a
method to delve into several core categories that emerged from the open coding process.
Concurrently with both coding processes, constant comparative data analysis was used to
study the relationship between various data, between data and categories, and between
categories. Memoing was employed as an active method of contemplating the data, the coding, and the comparative data analysis. Memos were written in response to individual passages of transcript data, to codes that were emerging as common (indicated by the HyperResearch frequency counter), to groupings and connections between and among codes, and to other memos. These memos ranged from brief notes or paragraphs to more extensive tentative analyses. The process of thinking via memoing led to further visits back to the transcript data to test those initial thoughts. The same kind of analysis was undertaken with the transcript of the stage-two focus group interview and with the data gathered through both stage-three surveys. Through all phases of data gathering and particularly in writing up final results and findings, creating the competency model, care was taken in assuring a valid process, avoiding researcher bias that could potentially come into play given the researcher’s own position as a community college dean who supervises faculty with whom he previously worked as a faculty member. In particular, the researcher tested and retested tentative and emerging conclusions against alternatives and/or negative cases for an assurance that valid findings were emerging.

**The Model**

Other competency models for leaders in higher education exist and can provide a context for this study. The University System of Georgia has a “USG Leadership Competency Model” that starts with (a) strategy, engagement, collaboration, and execution and narrows to (b) respect, transparency, excellence, and accountability, and finally narrows once again to the central themes of (c) integrity and ethics (University System of Georgia, 2011). This sequence of competencies is illustrated in a circle
diagram of related competencies shown with arrows and narrowing concentric circles with integrity and ethics in the middle. Another model comes from an Australian study by the University of Western Sydney and the Australian Council for Educational Research in which the authors present an “Academic Leadership Capability Framework” consisting of three main intersecting categories of capabilities, “personal capabilities,” “interpersonal capabilities,” and “cognitive capabilities” (Scott, Coates, & Anderson, 2008, p. 18). These, in turn, intersect with two main competencies, “generic competencies” and “role-specific competencies” (2008, p. 18). Visually, the model is depicted with Venn diagram-style circles that look much like the Olympic rings, the three capabilities intersecting with each other on a top row with the two competencies intersecting with each other (and with the three capabilities) on a bottom row, the total diagram showing how each competency and capability intersects with the others (p. 18).

Yet other models focus not so much on competencies but on the structural elements of leadership. Kezar (2012), for example, discusses a model of “bottom-up/top-down” leadership in what she calls a “kaleidoscope convergence” in which there are overlapping interests and interactions between the bottom, grassroots change-makers and the top (p. 748). She uses the term “kaleidoscope” because of the unpredictable nature of this overlap—sometimes creating change and other times not (p. 745).

Models for management styles exist outside of higher education as well. For example, in the early 1960s Blake and Mouton (1975) presented what has become a long-standing visual model (or grid) for management with major variables being “concern for people” on the vertical axis and “concern for production” on the horizontal. The
resulting graph shows a model for managers divided into four quadrants: (a) country club management, (b) team management, (c) impoverished management, and (d) task management (p. 31). In the middle of the grid, at the intersection of all four quadrants is what Blake and Mouton labeled “middle of the road” where the manager has a concern for production but not at the expense of a concern for people (1975, p. 31).

All three of the above models provide context for the model that has emerged from this study. They are useful to analyze as examples that show relationships for leadership in higher education or for management in general. However, none of those models is focused specifically on the skills required of community college administrators in general or, in particular, of community college deans. As such, those models do not address the specific population of deans in this study, deans supervising faculty with whom they had been peers.

The basic elements of the competency model for this study may be seen in Figure 3.
This model positions the two outcomes of this study, (a) central competencies for a community college dean supervising former peers and (b) strategies for faculty who may become deans—between two primary forces of influence, the faculty (former peers) and upper-level administrators. The model also positions these outcomes between the AACC Competencies (2005) and whatever other competencies emerge from the interview and focus-group data. Here is the nexus at which important knowledge, behavior, and abilities will be revealed. Many of the challenges and competencies discussed in the
literature relate to this positioning of the dean between forces: between perceptions of who they are (Griffith, 2006; McCarthy, 2003); between work life and home life or personal and private life (Bailey, 2008; Gmelch, 1991; Gmelch, 2004); and between perceptions about decision-making and governance (Foster, 2006; Gallos, 2002; Reed, 2013). For this reason, the model that has emerged from this study shows how competencies for community college deans are at the center of (either related to or influenced by) other competencies and forces—in other words, irretrievably in the middle.
Chapter 4: Analysis and Results

Process for Analyzing Data

To approach the goals of discovering a model of competencies for community college deans who supervise their former peers and arriving at strategies for faculty who may be considering a move into the dean’s position, this project employed a grounded theory methodology and common procedures of analysis for grounded theory. Those procedures include open, axial, and selective coding—an overall process that, in essence, takes the data apart and reassembles it in a way that is meaningful and consistent with what is grounded in the data, allowing for a theory or model to emerge from the data.

Open coding. The coding process began with Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) concept of this initial stage of data analysis, engaging the text data line by line several times, coding the text and arranging those codes to discover categories and also properties and dimensions (p. 69). For example, interview participants mentioned many kinds and aspects of communication they deemed necessary in the dean position. Individual passages were coded Listening, Communicating difficult information, Communicating context, and several other initial codes; all of these were sorted together under a category called Communication. This process allowed for a breaking apart and sorting of the data into categories but also looking inside each category for properties present and dimensions of the properties. The process of identifying initial categories
and then properties and dimensions was not necessarily sequential. Frequently, properties became apparent almost simultaneously with identifying the code or category. Transcript data from the ten stage-one interviews revealed many categories. Table 1 illustrates just a few of those categories in relation to the interview data to which they correspond.

**Table 1: Open Coding Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee Response</th>
<th>Code (Category)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Many of us who came from the faculty ranks, have some teaching experiences—we know that communication there is important as well.”</td>
<td>Dean/teaching connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You know, one of the things I know I have now that I wouldn’t have really understood—and maybe I didn’t have it then—is the fact that I can think it’s okay for me to think, “Wow, I did that completely wrong; I wish I had done this.”</td>
<td>Humility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Awareness of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think that’s the right thing to do, but also I think in terms of running your division, I mean, you can’t afford to have grudges as a dean.”</td>
<td>Fairness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This process of identifying initial codes yielded even more detailed information when properties and dimensions were taken from those categories. Table 2 illustrates how one of the data passages from Table 1 above produced a code category but also several properties and a dimension (range of properties). In this process, open coding moves
from initial identification to a process of noting characteristics and elements within the codes that begin to lead toward meaningful analysis.

**Table 2: Category, Property, Dimension**

**Response**
“Many of us who came from the faculty ranks, have some teaching experiences—we know that communication there is important as well.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (code)</th>
<th>Properties</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>connection to audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charisma</td>
<td>to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>connection to audience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This process of open coding illustrates how text data from the interview transcriptions was approached in great detail, breaking it down beyond the initial category. Over 80 separate codes were identified in the process of open coding of the all data for this study.

Richards and Morse (2007) describe categorizing as a second stage in the coding process that starts with 1) initial coding (open coding), moves to 2) creating *categories*, then to 3) creating *concepts*, and finally to 4) establishing a *theory*. This study often used such a sequence to take codes that appeared frequently across many text passages and to re-code them into categories before determining if they were to become part of the final competency model (theory). An example was the code “Dean/Teaching Connection,” which appeared 26 times in the initial interview transcripts alone. This initial code was categorized into several other codes including (a) communication, (b) problem solving,
(c) knowing about instruction, (d) focusing on needs, (e) planning and caring, (f) motivating, and (g) creativity/imagination. This categorization led to a conceptualizing of the data under the initial code and eventually to one category, “knowledge about instruction,” becoming a part of the final model.

Another process that aided open coding was using the frequency report tool in HyperResearch. This tool counts the number of text passages to which a researcher has applied a particular code. For instance, of the 731 passages that were given a code in the first stage individual interviews, 19 were coded “being transparent” and 17 were coded “context of previous dean.” The counts ranged from one to 48. Those codes with moderate or high counts were considered for further analysis by looking for categories, properties, and dimensions.

**Axial coding.** Whereas open coding breaks down the data into categories, properties, and dimensions, axial coding asks the researcher to look at relationships and connections between categories and groupings of codes. Using this process, a researcher determines a central phenomenon or code and groups related information (causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences) around it, showing relationships between a category and related factors, all of this called a coding paradigm (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 127). Figure 4 shows an example of axial coding with one central phenomenon, collaboration, and related causes, conditions, context, consequences, and strategies displayed around that central phenomenon.
This study incorporated this kind of coding paradigm through axial coding when it was necessary to understand causal conditions, strategies, and context—when it was necessary to go beyond categorizing and observing relationships.

**Selective coding.** Strauss and Corbin (1998) described this last phase of coding as the point at which the researcher writes a theory based on the interrelationships of codes and categories found in the axial coding process (p. 143). For this study of community college deans, with three phases of data gathering, selective coding began as
a tentative statement of a competency model for community college deans (and its parts) that would be explored further with the data collected in the second and third phases of data collection. This model was evaluated, re-evaluated, and modified after an analysis of data from Stage 2, the focus-group interview, and then again after an analysis of the two surveys in Stage 3.

Findings In Relation to Research Questions

The findings for this study have been organized into three main parts. The first part, divided into four sections, addresses each of the subquestions for the study. The second part analyzes the context for the competency model, a context of challenges that deans face in their position. The third part presents the model of competencies itself.

Subquestion #1. The first subquestion asked, “How is the dean’s job impacted by close familiarity with the faculty?” That subquestion is very much related to part of the central research question, which asked, “What are the advantages as well as the challenges faced by community college deans when supervising, managing, and leading colleagues from the same division in which they taught?” The ten deans participating in individual interviews were asked several questions from the interview guide (Appendix A) related to this overall subquestion:

4. Please describe for me the advantages and disadvantages of supervising the faculty with whom you were once a peer.

5. What competencies or strategies do you employ that are of particular help in supervising those former peers? and

7. Can you describe for me your relationship with the faculty in your area? How has your relationship with the faculty evolved from the time you were teaching and working with them to now?
Employing the process of open coding for the responses to these questions and others led to categories for both advantages and disadvantages that were identifiable. These categories were explored with axial coding to better understand them.

**Advantages.** One advantage of supervising former colleagues mentioned by the dean respondents was simply knowing the faculty, the areas in which the faculty work, the curriculum and culture of the division, the personalities, and, to varying degrees, the processes of how the division works. Some deans commented on the practical advantage of knowing the personalities of the faculty. One dean said, “I’m kind of familiar with the culture of the division and the nuances of what might work a little better with one person in terms of offering corrective advice or suggestions. That helps.” Others reflected on how their familiarity with the faculty, and the faculty with them, earned them the benefit of the doubt, at least initially, when difficult issues came up. One dean mentioned an “initial positive relationship with them,” and another explained that the respect the dean had generated as a faculty member “carries a great deal of goodwill when you sit in a position of managing [the faculty]. You understand them, but they understand you. They also understand the position you’re in, and they’re willing to bend for you, too.”

Several deans related this good will with the faculty to the dean’s knowledge of the content in the discipline, the idea that a dean who had come from the math department and had a professor’s knowledge of mathematics was trusted by the faculty. One dean said simply, “And your knowledge of the subject matter is huge, I think.” This came out in the focus group as well, one participant commenting, “I would probably say that knowing the faculty and having familiarity with the area in terms of content
curriculum, having taught here, is a strength.” Another talked about the faculty trusting that he knew what they were going through in the classroom and with their students. That knowledge earned him trust when it came time to evaluate them.

That aspect of trust is related to another advantage, that of carrying a positive reputation into the dean’s position. According to some deans, this reputation is earned in the classroom and in other arenas in which faculty operate. One said, “I think they knew that I was dedicated to the profession of teaching. I mean, I did a lot of stuff while I was there as a teacher and demonstrated that time and time again.... So they knew I had a good work ethic.”

Several deans also mentioned that an advantage of supervising former peers is that they are more willing or comfortable communicating with you. One dean stated, “They are not afraid to speak up, and that is definitely an advantage, I think. They know me; they know me fairly well, and they didn’t have a problem coming in and speaking up.” This was seen as an advantage because it made it easier to accomplish the work that needed to be done. One dean also saw it as an advantage because she got advice from the faculty in her area: “I got some really good advice, and I got my whole thinking changed a couple of times by what they were telling me.” In this case, the dean saw the faculty as a resource to help her become better in her new position, and this was made easier because the faculty were comfortable speaking their minds to her.

**Disadvantages.** The disadvantages of supervising faculty who had been former peers fell into several categories as well. The first disadvantage is the ironic opposition to the first advantage—that the dean knows the faculty. In fact, one dean explained it like
this: “I think the advantages are that you know them and they know you, and that’s also the disadvantage.” As an example, a different dean explained that she found it particularly hard when she knew negative history of the faculty: “Where it’s difficult is if you have some long-standing traditions that are hard to move people off of. They do a lot of crazy things, and they’re constantly getting themselves in hot water.” She felt it difficult because she had a personal connection with the people who had these traditions, and she could anticipate that those traditions would cause her trouble in the future.

A related disadvantage of supervising the faculty who had been former colleagues is that they have unreasonable expectations of what the dean should do or will do. These expectations are based on who the dean was when he or she was a faculty member. One dean explained:

I think sometimes your former colleagues might think that the positive relationship you had with them also means that the way you conduct your job as the dean isn’t going to change too much, and so it will be business as usual—and of course you’re not going to make any cuts to their resources or change things.

Another dean agreed that faculty will expect the dean to treat them favorably based on the fact that the dean used to work in their specific area: “The only disadvantage I could see is if there is cronyism, and they would expect you to toe the line—’Hey, now that you’re here, don’t forget where you came from. You need to do this for us.’” A different dean explained the reaction some faculty have when he has had to make an unpopular decision: “Sometimes there would be an undercurrent of betrayal like, ‘Well, you used to be faculty. How can you do this to us?’” These expectations are related to the perception of how the dean should act and treat people in his or her new role. One dean said, “It does create a challenge where their perceptions of who you are and what motivates you
may not be consistent with where you are now. So they don’t factor in a new role. They just see you as you were before.” This disadvantage is especially relevant whenever the dean has to make decisions and must be fair to multiple parties in evaluation, allotting resources, scheduling, and resolving student or instructor complaints. A dean in the focus group interview emphasized that this disadvantage of supervising his former peers is that they expect him to be an advocate for the faculty. He explained the faculty thinking: “You were a faculty member so you should be advocating for us. And it doesn’t matter what anybody above you thinks. It’s just what we want. That’s what you’re supposed to take forward.” One can see how encountering those expectations, especially after having worked side-by-side with the people who hold those expectations, can serve as a disadvantage for a dean who has moved into the position after teaching.

Subquestion #2. The second subquestion of this study asked, “How do the deans’ competencies in this situation fit in the context of the AACC’s Competencies for Community College Leaders?” This was an important question given the prominent role of the AACC Competencies for community colleges; the stature of the AACC as an organization, a leader in research and development in nearly every aspect of two-year colleges; and the use of the AACC Competencies as a conceptual framework for this study. The six competencies—organizational strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, community college advocacy, and professionalism—remain an important focus in the literature on community college leadership in general and on the role of community college deans. (See Chapter 2.) The Competencies, after originally being developed at a leadership summit called Leading Forward, were studied
with a survey of community college leaders and experts in community college leadership. According to the “Competency for Community College Leaders” document, “One-hundred percent of the respondents noted that each of the six competencies was either ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ essential to the effective performance of a community college leader...” (AACC, 2005, p. 2). The question relevant for the current study is whether those competencies, written for community college leaders at all levels, would be relevant for leaders at the level of division dean (called department chair in some colleges), the entry-level administrative position in which the leader directly supervises faculty. Even more specifically, do those competencies resonate for those deans who have risen from a faculty position within a division or department and now supervise the faculty with whom they were peers?

To address this question, participants in the stage one individual interviews were asked several questions regarding the AACC Competencies to start the interview (see Appendix A):

1. Prior to meeting today, I sent you a summary of the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders and asked you to rate each in order of importance for your job as a dean. Could you tell me how you rated each and perhaps a few reasons why?

2. How would you assess your level of competence in these areas when you first became a dean? What were your strengths? Your weaknesses?

3. What competencies have you improved in? Can you describe areas in which you think you need to improve even more?

The responses to these questions, to others in the interview, and to additional questions in the focus group session and the questionnaires revealed that some of the AACC
Competencies were viewed as essential but not all. Open and axial coding as described in the beginning of this chapter revealed the relative importance of the competencies and the situations and contexts in which respondents viewed them as important.

**Community college advocacy.** To varying degrees, the deans expressed that all the AACC competencies were important; however, unlike the respondents in the original AACC survey, the ten deans for this study did not put a high degree of relevance on the competency of community college advocacy. Most deans mentioned it only briefly. One dean said, “Being a voice in favor of community college generally, while important, was the last sort of priority.” Other deans echoed this idea that community college advocacy is important but not a significant part of their job as dean, not what they do on a daily basis. Another dean explained:

Community college advocacy, in terms of my job itself, I feel like I do that to a certain extent in terms of organizational strategy in that I’m trying to help people to work on the mission of the community college, but I think it’s way more indirect than that. I think that other people do that, but I don’t do that very much. I mean, that’s not as an important part of what I do.

The deans suggested that this competency was too far removed from the tasks they perform regularly. The Competency document (AACC, 2005) describes community college advocacy as “advocate[ing] for the community college mission to all constituents and empower[ing] them to do the same” and “represent[ing] the community college in the local community, in the broader educational community, at various levels of government, and as a model of higher education that can be replicated in international settings” (p. 6). However, deans in this study saw their role in advocacy as a more local effort. Several deans commented on the fact that their job does not give them the
opportunity to be representing the college (or community colleges in general) to the public as much as would occur if they were in a higher level position. One dean said, “This one was rated the lowest only because in my current position as dean I’m not working with the public very much. I’m not interfacing with them.” However, this same dean explained,

You know, the advocacy here for me is the realization that we have the courses that students need to transfer or earn their certificate, to have the minimum requirements for professional programs or pre-professional programs. That’s where my advocacy comes in, making sure we have good schedules and good course offerings for our students. Should I be an associate vice president or a vice president, then I would be interfacing much more with the public, and, of course, you know, my advocacy would change accordingly. So that’s why I had it rated the lowest, not because it’s not important, only because in my current capacity, I don’t deal a lot with the public.

In that sense, this competency for community college deans is much different than for other community college leaders. The deans did not disagree with its importance; they just did not see it as relevant to their day-to-day work. The faculty in their questionnaire corroborated this. When asked to rank the AACC Competencies, nearly two-thirds of the 16 respondents ranked community college advocacy last. No respondents ranked it first or second. They just did not see it as important—or at least not as important as the other AACC Competencies.

**Organizational strategy.** Another AACC competency is organizational strategy, and the deans in this study did see this competency as important and relevant, but focused more locally than is suggested in the AACC document’s descriptors. In the AACC document, a leader is described as meeting this competency if he or she “strategically improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization,
promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment and future trends” (AACC, 2005, p. 4). The context here is institutional, a focus on the well-being of the organization overall. Initial coding and searching interview and focus group transcriptions for the code “organizational strategy” revealed many interview comments on this topic. Further categorizing and axial coding revealed that some of the deans in this study focused on that institutional concept of organizational strategy, while others identified this competency in a simpler way.

Those deans that interpreted this competency in a simpler way saw it as organizing and planning within their division, or even simply being organized and systematic in their daily work. One dean said, “To me, organizational strategy meant sort of how you structure and I suppose manage your office and also your division.” Another dean mentioned that it was one of her strengths: “Organization—that’s why I’m good in my job. I’m an organizer. My room’s organized. This is organized. Everything’s organized. Not too much but enough.” Yet another dean mentioned it as a source of frustration: “Sometimes it takes over the more important parts of the job, because there’s so many pieces to organize.”

Most deans, however, viewed this competency in the context of strategic planning, of systematically looking forward with goals and objectives to better the educational services offered in their areas. Some deans felt this was one of their strengths; others mentioned it as an area that did not come naturally to them, an area in which they needed to improve. One dean discussed the future direction of his division
and his role in it: “If you’re not organized, you know, it can be devastating to your productivity, so I look at this globally like, ‘Where is the division? Where does the division need to be X number of years from now?’ So all that comes from planning.” Other deans emphasize the importance of strategic and organizational planning by emphasizing that they lack the time to do that part of their job well. One dean linked the need for strategic planning to student success:

The organizational strategy is huge. I mean, if we could just be doing that more, I think, in each of our areas.... I have so many different departments that we need to promote—I mean in one department we promote success with students in one way, and then in another department a whole other way.

This same dean, however, expressed a need for more time for long-term planning. She said, “You know, so much is solving the problem that’s right in front of us, but the reason the problem exists has to do with more of a strategic kind of thing that I hardly ever have enough time to do.” In this way, the simpler conception of organization strategy, as a competency that relates only to the workflow in one’s office or division, is linked to the larger, long-term conception of it as strategic planning. If a dean has difficulty managing the work that is immediately at hand, that dean may also have difficulty planning long-term for the division or college.

A third category under organizational strategy indicates that, for some deans, this competency was tied to the history and/or context of the organization. One dean explains, “You do not want to fight against that history; you want to use it to take you where you need to go. So understanding the organizational context and the history is really important.” This dean is getting at the concept of understanding the direction of the organization in which one works—and using that knowledge for long-term planning.
This is especially important for the dean position since the dean is not setting the direction for the entire college but rather for a part of it that needs to operate within the whole.

Overall, the deans in this study viewed the competency of organizational strategy as an important one, even if they were not conceiving of it at the institutional level and even if they felt they were not especially adept at it or did not have enough time to devote to it. When faculty were asked to rank organizational strategy within the AACC Competencies in their questionnaire, there was no strong consistency to their rankings. In fact, of the 16 faculty respondents, three ranked it first in importance, four ranked it fifth, and the others were distributed in between. (No one ranked it sixth.) This suggests that faculty who might be considering a move to the dean position do not have a consistent conception of the importance of organizational strategy even though half of the respondents ranked it in the top three, suggesting that they thought of it as at least somewhat important.

Resource management. Like organizational strategy, the AACC competency of resource management was viewed by the deans in this study from a somewhat more narrow focus compared to the description of the competency in the AACC document. The AACC document lists some examples that correspond to the deans’ concept of this competency, for instance “implement[ing] financial strategies to support programs, services, staff, and facilities” and “employ[ing] organizational, time management, planning, and delegation skills (AACC, 2005, p. 4). However, other descriptions of this competency are focused at the institutional level and therefore did not show up in the
deans’ interview comments about resource management. For example, the AACC document mentions “support[ing] operational decisions by managing information resources and ensuring the integrity and integration of reporting systems and databases” as well as “implementing a human resources system that includes recruitment, hiring, reward, and performance management systems and that fosters the professional development and advancement of all staff” (AACC, 2005, p. 4). The deans in this study mentioned their responsibilities in managing resources and in hiring, but decisions about “human resources systems” and “reporting systems and databases” are made at higher levels in the organization.

Nevertheless, the deans in this study viewed resource management as an important competency for their position. How they viewed it exactly, though, depended on the nature of the division in which they worked. If a dean worked in a division that required the acquisition and maintenance of facilities and equipment in a significant way, then that dean saw resource management as a main part of the position and a critical competency. One dean explained, “A hundred thousand dollars can be swallowed up in chemistry in 10 minutes with four instruments, easily, sometimes with one instrument.” That dean and others who managed many physical resources saw this competency as being critical. Another dean in this situation said it is “part of being able to do your job, being able to get the things that your division needs and the college needs.” This dean went on to further explain how he viewed resource management:

You know, the first three years I’ve been here it’s been probably the most challenging fiscal crisis we’ve ever had and so I’ve come to feel like resource management is primarily what I do, and I think it’s a way we can reward faculty,
to give them things they want to do. So allocating resources to do the main mission of the college is really important.

The deans who were not significantly responsible for physical resources, those in the language arts or social sciences, for instance, tended to view resource management in a less significant way and focused on the management of employees as the main component. One dean focused on language from the AACC document about “sustaining people” (AACC, 2005, p.4) in the context of organizational strategy: “I really like their definition of it, the idea of ‘sustaining people.’ I don’t think it does any good to have an organizational strategy if you’re not trying to sustain your people.” Another dean agrees that people are her most significant resource to manage:

Really in a division like this, we don’t have very many resources to manage, but obviously, the primary one I would think, truthfully, that means so much to how we operate, is employees—I mean student help and instructional assistants and that kind of thing.

That kind of focus on employees as resources and on managing a small division budget was common for the deans who were not responsible for many physical resources.

When asked how they assessed their level of performance in the AACC competencies upon first taking the job and what competencies they have improved in, some of the deans in this study saw themselves as very proficient in resource management while others described it as a weakness. One dean who expressed his competence in this area said that, coupled with organizational strategy, resource management was what enabled him to be a good dean:

I think that when I have a good handle on those two areas—organizational strategy and understanding of how the organization works and also resources—when I have a handle on those two areas, I think that those really allow me to be
the best dean that I can be because in my mind that’s the way that I can help my faculty and programs to achieve their best.

This dean’s perception can be contrasted with a different dean who expressed a lack of knowledge about resource management when he first came into the position. In fact, this dean expressed a desire for training in both resource management and organizational strategy when he first took the job:

I wish, looking at organizational strategy and resource management, in particular those two, I wish the district and the college would have had mechanisms that would have allowed me to understand the processes, understand how to better plan strategically for things that were awaiting me and understand all the physical and financial things that we’re going to have to deal with.

This dean expressed the importance of resource management by explaining that he felt he needed better preparation to do his job. While some deans professed confidence with this competency and others less so, and while they viewed resource management through the lens of their particular division and the kinds of resources they managed, all the deans in this study saw this competency as being important—some with more emphasis, some with less, but important nonetheless. The faculty ranking of this competency reflected the deans’ responses. Only one instructor ranked it number one, but four ranked it second in importance and five ranked it third in importance. The anonymous survey responses did not allow for determining which divisions or disciplines were represented, but the relatively high rankings suggest that they view resource management as an important competency for a dean.

Professionalism. The deans in this study clearly saw three AACC competencies as prominent in importance. Professionalism (the others being communication and collaboration, to be discussed in upcoming sections) is one of the three. This became
apparent throughout the process of open coding individual interviews given the frequency of responses about professionalism and also the fact that several deans ranked this competency as the first or second most important of the six.

The deans’ conception about what defines professionalism varied from dean to dean; however, their views corresponded pretty closely with the description and illustration of this competency in the AACC document. One of the AACC descriptors for professionalism is “promot[ing] and maintain[ing] high standards for personal and organizational integrity, honesty, and respect for people” (AACC, 2005, p. 6). This was a common thread for comments in the dean interviews although the exact language for expressing it varied. Several deans used the word “ethics.” For instance, one dean said, “I rated professionalism first, because in my mind the ethical framework in which I operate is more important than anything else. I don’t think I can do a good job if I don’t have that framework. And I don’t think I have a good way to make decisions if I don’t have that framework.” Another dean put it this way, after saying she had ranked it as the first most important competency: “It’s important ethically for me to set high standards for myself and others. And you have to set the standard model behavior that you would expect of those that you supervise. So I had that rated as number one.” This dean echoed what several other deans mentioned, that the concept of professionalism is related to the process of serving as an example for the faculty and staff one supervises, modeling the behavior that one would expect from them. Here are comments from two deans related to that:
It’s something that I carried from the classroom that was number one for me in the classroom and for my students. What I would expect of myself I would expect for them.

I try to maintain professionalism as an example to others, and think that’s important—but a casual professionalism where you’re still very engaged on a human basis with everyone.

The deans in this study supported this concept of professionalism in their questionnaire as well. Deans described professionalism as “demonstrating the values and characteristics by which she/he is evaluating members of the area,” “modeling fair, unbiased and responsible behavior and work ethic that reflect the goals and values of the institution,” “conducting your daily business with integrity and treating others with respect,” and “rising above the fray to take care of business and to treat each person with equal respect.” These descriptions all factor in the element of respect and treating others with dignity.

This concept of professionalism, how a dean treats those around him or her, is closely related to yet another vision of the competency, that the dean should maintain a certain image or conduct him- or herself with certain behavior to instill confidence and trust with faculty and staff. This is perhaps a common view of professionalism, one in which the dean simply acts or behaves in a way that signals to others that he or she is competent and trustworthy or in control of a given situation. One dean explained that she thinks this view of professionalism is relevant to the competency of communication:

I think how you present and represent yourself to your faculty, your colleagues and to the community is really important. So that’s why I thought professionalism was really important. And I think that if you conduct yourself that way, it also supports communication. It gives you credibility as a communicator.
Maintaining one’s image or sustaining credibility is an aspect of professionalism fundamental to communication because of the amount and variety of communication required of a dean. Another dean also mentioned the connection between these competencies, saying, “It’s part of communication to me. It’s how we present ourselves and being ethical and telling the truth and that kind of thing.” In the dean questionnaire, one respondent put it simply: “Be an example.” Other deans also mentioned the importance of a dean modeling behavior. That kind of professionalism—image and credibility—is developed over time through numerous opportunities to communicate, in one-on-one meetings, in formal communication (performance evaluation, for instance) as well as informal communication (hallway conversations). That professionalism is borne of major decisions and minor ones. A dean may come into the position with a “professional” reputation, but that image is subject to change based on the communication and the work he or she does.

Several deans in this study discussed the concept of professionalism as directly related to the kind or work they did and how they assisted faculty in becoming better at their jobs. These deans saw their responsibilities as more than merely maintaining the status quo, of keeping the operation running smoothly, or of keeping the peace between and among employees. One dean notes, “I think professionalism is critical if you’re going to be a change agent or support faculty who want to be change agents going forward because you have to create a vision. Without that knowledge that professionalism brings, you’re not going to have that vision.” In that sense, an instructional dean can be seen to have options for how to be professional. One can leave
one’s faculty alone because they are the content experts. In this view the dean shouldn’t interfere in their responsibility of teaching. Alternatively, the dean can lead them toward more effective ways of delivering instruction, encouraging innovation and change. This latter view was expressed strongly by one dean:

What I see in professionalism is really around the fact that we’re undergoing rapid change, and deans can’t be passive in that. It’s not just about scheduling. It’s “What are we doing in the classroom?” And I think that some faculty resent the fact that a dean would come in here and make suggestions about how they should act in the classroom. But we are instructional deans and I think that we need to do that. We need to support our faculty who are interested in exploring new avenues, really support that and push in that direction.

Faculty resistance to a dean’s desire to help them change their methods of teaching can be a significant hurdle. Nevertheless, some deans saw it as their responsibility and a key aspect of professionalism in their position. That sense of responsibility illustrates the very first descriptor for professionalism offered in the AACC Competencies: “Demonstrate transformational leadership through authenticity, creativity, and vision” (AACC, 2005, p. 6).

Professionalism was discussed not only in terms of what it is but also in terms of its use, particularly in how important the competency is when a dean is faced with a challenging situation. One dean discussed an uncomfortable situation when a faculty member, a former colleague, frequently did not show up for class. This dean explained it was his professionalism that was critical when he sat down and talked with the professor. In particular, he noted that his own reputation was a help in that conversation and others he has had: “I don’t want to insult them, but the point is, because of my work ethic, they know I’m coming in with quite a bit of clout as far as what I expect.”
Overall, deans in this study viewed the competency of professionalism as very important, and their conception of it corresponded closely with many aspects the competency as presented in the AACC document. As with the other AACC competencies, professionalism in that document was in some ways focused more on executive-level leadership—“Understand and endorse the history, philosophy, and culture of the community college” (AACC, 2005, p. 6)—but in most ways the competency as described by the AACC was very much in line with the deans’ concept of it in this study. Faculty respondents, as indicated in their ranking of the AACC Competencies, also saw professionalism as important although perhaps not to the degree that the deans did. Three instructors ranked it number one and six ranked it in their top three, yet four had it ranked last. This suggests that the importance of the competency becomes more apparent after a faculty member moves into the dean position.

**Collaboration.** The deans in this study viewed collaboration as another of the AACC competencies that was of great importance. However, it was notable that their concept of collaboration was quite different from the descriptors in the AACC document, which again is focused on a more executive-level version of the competency. One descriptor, for example, was never mentioned by the deans in this study: “Work effectively and diplomatically with unique constituent groups such as legislators, board members, business leaders, accreditation organizations, and others” (AACC, 2005, p. 5), even though some of the deans have some of those responsibilities built into their positions. The deans in this study saw collaboration as being critical, but what they meant was collaboration with faculty. In fact, the emphasis on collaboration with this
one group was so prominent that the deans only rarely mentioned collaboration with each other or with other administrators.

Deans saw this competency as particularly valuable for a couple reasons. One is that they saw those around them as a valuable source of ideas and information from whom they could learn when planning or making decisions. One dean explained, “I’ve had several instances where I’ve learned that asking the opinion of everybody is actually so much more beneficial because they think of things that I would never have thought of.” Another dean mentioned using a SWOT analysis (a process of identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) with the faculty in his division to collaboratively come up with a direction for planning in the division. In the questionnaire for deans, one respondent mentioned that collaboration is critical in order to fully understand the issues at hand: “Deans are not subject matter experts in all disciplines and therefore require the input of department chairs, faculty, staff and management colleagues to help guide their decision making process.” These deans viewed collaboration with faculty as an integral part of a process that would lead to best outcomes as opposed to assuming they were hired to have the best answers and were responsible for delivering those answers to the faculty.

Another reason deans viewed collaboration as important is that they knew it was expected of them in a system with a strong history of shared governance and shared decision-making. This ethic seemed not to be questioned by the deans in this study. One remarked:

I think that everything we do is through people and with people, and if you aren’t collaborative, eventually you’re going to hit a wall. It might be sooner; it might
be later. But people are who we travel with, and even though we might have different ideas and visions about what we want to achieve, in terms of an end goal, I think it’s very important to let everyone’s voice be heard.

This “wall” that a dean might hit could be resistance about a decision that is not made collaboratively; however, this dean also suggested that the “end goal” will be better if multiple voices are heard. Another dean explained the cultural expectation about collaboration: “Sometimes it’s people want to be included who are not even part of the decision-making process, but they are interested.” There is a strong history in community colleges of collaborative decision making such that both faculty and deans expect it. At times the faculty’s expectation of collaboration may seem like a burden to a dean, the necessity of consulting on so many matters, but deans in this study viewed this competency as critical nonetheless. In his questionnaire response, one dean said, “In the California community colleges where shared/participatory governance is valued, collaboration is important. More importantly, with limited resources and multiple student success related mandatory compliance requirements, it is difficult if not impossible to succeed as a college without collaboration.”

Several deans focused on collaboration and the role it plays in developing positive relationships. One dean explained, “I would like to think of my relationship with faculty as being a partnership. I have a job to do and they have a job to do. And much of what I do supports them in doing their job.” A different dean emphasized not only the value to the work environment but also the personal value in working collaboratively with the faculty in her area:

I’ve learned to slow down and appreciate the people I’m working with rather than just look at them for what their needs might be. And I think that’s healthy
overall—both ways. And I’ve probably made some really good friendships that will last after I retire, from taking the time in getting to know the people I’m working with a little bit better.

Those ideas of developing positive relationships and of getting the best work done appear connected or interrelated in the deans’ comments. One dean said that collaboration was the competency that allowed him to be his best in the job: “The teams that I’ve been able to build and work with—at whatever level, whether it’s in the administrative office or with my faculty—that’s what makes it possible to do the other parts of the job.” In the focus group interview, the deans quickly identified collaboration as one of top two competencies (along with communication) they value in the job. Interestingly, faculty did not rank collaboration as high as other competencies, despite the emphasis in the California Community College system on shared or participatory governance. Overall, it was ranked fifth of the six AACC competencies. This, like the faculty ranking of professionalism, suggests that collaboration may be a competency that deans learn is important once they come into the position. Still, several narrative comments by faculty supported the importance of collaboration.

**Communication.** The AACC competency of communication was viewed by the deans in this study as being another very important aspect of their position. Deans mentioned it on its own or as one of its subcategories more often than any other competency in their stage-one interviews, and it was stressed considerably in the focus-group interview as well. In addition, the faculty ranked communication in their questionnaire as the most important competency for a dean, 15 out of the 16 instructors listing it in their top three.
The AACC document offers an overall description of this competency: “An effective community college leader uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and its surrounding community, to promote the success of all students, and to sustain the community college mission” (AACC, 2005, p. 5). As with the other AACC competencies, communication was also presented with an executive leadership frame, but most of the language from the document corresponded well with the concepts from the deans.

In open coding of the individual interviews, it became evident early on that the overall property of “communication” would have to be coded into a number of other categories and dimensions that would more clearly indicate what the participants meant. These categories include (a) being transparent, (b) assuring clarity, (c) communicating context, (d) communicating difficult information, (e) communicating to motivate, (f) knowing whom to include and follow-through, (g) methods of communication, and (h) listening attentively. The paragraphs that follow explain these categories as parts of the overall competency of communication.

**Transparency.** One common thread in participant comments about communication was transparency, the concept of open communication, a process of deans allowing faculty and others access to the information and thought processes used to make decisions and an avoidance of keeping information to themselves. Deans discussed this both in reference to communicating with groups and with individuals. One dean said she thought transparency was important with her faculty as a group because it gave everyone a common understanding of a situation: “We’re all on the same page so we all
understand what we’re doing, why we’re doing it, from dialoguing in division meetings or having meetings with the chairs to walking around visiting people in their offices.”

Another dean discussed the importance of one-on-one transparency in the aftermath of a difficult disagreement with a faculty member, after the disagreement had been resolved:

   And one of the things is I still told him and I’ve written him an email saying, “You know, we should still keep our communications open, and we should still be able to talk and work out situations and concerns. It’s best to come and discuss it and not have it pent up.”

Another dean explained that she felt transparency was especially important when she did not have all the information, when information was trickling in from higher levels of management and she was attempting to keep the faculty in her division informed. For her, transparency was a way of giving status updates on matters about which the faculty may be feeling especially anxious:

   And I think it is okay to be able to say, “I do not have all the information. It is all that I know at this point. And I’m communicating with you, I’m letting you know that we will have probably more information coming, and I will learn more, but these are the things that are coming out.”

This kind of openness has the benefit of helping to avoid hard feelings and of getting in front of rumors that might start. One dean said, “I am pretty transparent. So even though there are always faculty members who want to believe that some sort of agenda is taking place, I try to be as open about how things are done as possible.” During the focus group interview, another dean spoke about giving department chairs complete budget information, more than they’ve ever had before. From that perspective, it is better to be proactive in one’s communication than to be reactive later on, when faculty may be wondering how or why you made a particular decision.
A common purpose for transparency was in conflict resolution or in highly-charged matters. For instance, one dean discussed how he found it to be especially important to be transparent when communicating with his department chairs about the division budget. He explained that he showed the department chairs all the money that was available to the division and opened a conversation about how it should be used, rather than assuming that a rollover of last year’s budget allocations would be preferable.

Another dean mentioned that his transparency in working with his budget was helpful during a time of budget cuts: “When the time came, we all did it very well. There were no hard feelings across departments or anything else because a lot of it was communicated well and we were very transparent in the process.” Again, these deans emphasized how being transparent helped in that it prevented conflict from occurring in the first place.

Other deans also mentioned the overall benefits of transparency. One dean mentioned that open communication was the key to a positive relationship with the faculty in his area:

I don’t like hiding things from them. Certainly, I will maintain confidentiality of stuff that I need to maintain confidentiality over. But by and large I work very openly with my folks. And I think that pays off tremendously. You know, I like to believe that I have less strife within my division than some of the other divisions in the college, and that has a lot to do with that.

Other deans emphasized that benefit of improving overall relationships as well. Several of the deans mentioned having an open-door policy, but they discussed transparency as being more than that. Rather than just being available to talk, they presented themselves as needing to be conscious of when and how to deliver information and be transparent,
what might be considered an active transparency. In the focus group discussion, one dean made the point that transparency does not always come easily. She felt that “new deans can get in trouble trying to figure out how to be open in their communication” and that explaining hard decisions to those who were recently colleagues can be a challenge. Other deans cautioned that there are times when transparency is not the key, times when it could be hurtful to reveal too much information. One noted, “I don’t think we ever, ever, in any position, can throw someone who’s our supervisor under the bus.” Nevertheless, overall, they affirmed that striving for transparency was good practice for a new dean.

Clarity. Another category of communication the deans mentioned was clarity of communication. This is related to transparency but is different in that transparency is about being forthcoming while clarity is about how effectively one’s messages are being received and understood. Deans sometimes expressed the importance of clarity by mentioning that it was something they needed to improve upon or that they had already improved upon. One dean said, “That’s something I’m constantly trying to improve on. Sometimes you assume people know things and you just forget to tell them.” This dean went on to explain, “I think a lot of the little things that go wrong in the department are a lack of communication.” A different dean discussed clarity as something that goes beyond stating one’s thoughts cogently in speaking or writing situations. For this dean, it was a matter of articulating thinking processes and assumptions so those around the dean would understand what his overall intent was:

I think it’s important as a trust-building process—communicating with the goal of clearly stating what your intentions are in the context of the culture of the division
you’re in, and what it reflects. It’s a window on who you are as a person, the way you communicate.

Other deans mentioned that clarity of communication “reflects” upon the dean and has the opportunity of enhancing relationships with faculty and others. One said, “I needed to be an effective communicator, both in terms of clarity and in terms of establishing good relationships, working relationships, with different places on campus.”

The clarity of one’s communication was frequently seen as a challenge, something to work on continuously, and the language deans used expressed this. One dean talked about the necessity of “polishing” his communication skills while another described working on clear communication as “an art.” Yet another talked about having worked on and developed her communication skills in emails. Overall, clarity of communication was mentioned less often than the related category of transparency, but it came up often enough to show that the deans in this study felt it was an important part of what they work on.

*Communicating context.* Another category of communication that came up frequently in interviews with deans was that of *communicating context.* One of the descriptors for communication in the AACC document is to “articulate and champion shared mission, vision, and values to internal and external audiences, appropriately matching message to audience” (AACC, 2005, p. 5). The division dean, positioned in the organizational hierarchy between upper management and the faculty, is frequently in the position of needing to contextualize a message or a decision within the mission, vision, or values of the institution. One dean put it this way:
I’m a big-picture person. I like to say, “Why are we doing this?” I mean it’s not like, “Oh, tell me what to do and I’m going to do it.” So if you know what the goal is, you can perhaps work on different things you need to do to achieve that goal and to meet the goal of student success.

That objective of providing faculty with the big picture was common in conversations with the deans, especially as a strategy for delivering difficult news or discussing topics that would be controversial to the faculty, for instance, raising class caps (the number of students allowed to enroll in sections of a class). One dean mentioned this situation and talked about needing to explain where the decision was coming from, saying that if it came from the vice president, the faculty should also know what was behind the vice president’s decision so they could understand the dean’s action. As a response in the dean questionnaire, one participant noted, “Creating the context for an issue or decision helps the ‘receiver’ understand why. Even if there is little support for the decision, it is more likely to be accepted.” This explanation shows that providing context has more benefit than just being clear; it helps a dean be persuasive as well.

Some deans explained this concept of contextualizing communication as simply a matter of giving faculty information they need to have to understand a situation that affected them. One dean talked about showing a full-time faculty member a section of the faculty-district collective bargaining agreement so the faculty member would understand his contractual obligation about the number of days per week he was required to be on campus. In giving this information, the dean was able to differentiate between his opinions about the faculty member’s teaching ability and his obligations. The dean described his discussion with the professor: “I said, ‘Have a seat,’ and then I said, ‘You’re a full-time faculty. I’m just saying that because you’re full time faculty there’s a
full-time faculty contract. It’s not you as a person, of course. I visited your class, and I absolutely know that you are a fabulous instructor.” In this way, by putting the conversation in the context of the contract, the dean was able to assure the faculty member of his value while also holding him to the contractual obligations that apply to all full-time faculty.

Deans discussed the challenges of contextualizing information for faculty especially when the interests of the college or district differ from those of the faculty. One dean explained,

I might take [an issue] to leadership and might even be a strong advocate for something, but I have to go back to the faculty and share where leadership concerns with whatever they might have an interest in doing is not being supported. And, being that go-between is a challenge, of course.

That position of being a “go-between” is what obligates the dean to create contexts to help faculty understand that what they are doing in the classroom and with students is part of a larger operation. One dean, assuming that there is just too much context in terms of information and shifting decision making, says that to do this he tries to be “as diligent a researcher as [he] can be.” Other deans echoed this approach, that if they did not know what was behind a decision, they would try to find out.

**Communicating difficult information.** A closely related category of the competency of communication that became evident early in the process of analyzing interview transcripts was that of communicating difficult information. One dean put the matter succinctly: “As an administrator, you must be willing to make and enforce unpopular decisions.” Another dean, reinforcing the idea that deans are in a difficult in-the-middle position, agreed: “We get directives from on high, and we have to deliver the
message, whether we disagree or agree.” Nearly every dean in the first stage interviews mentioned this aspect of the position, and it came up prominently in the focus group as well. One dean said, “I think you’d have to have specific skills on working in one-to-one communication over difficult issues.” He emphasized that he thought this was a skill one has to learn, that “you don’t just pick it up.”

The goal for deans confronted with the situation of having to deliver difficult information varied from dean to dean. One dean sought to make the information understandable (clarity). Another thought that compromise was important when possible, tempering the anxiety associated with the news. Yet another dean sought a best outcome for the person to whom she delivered difficult news, saying, “I want this person to be in the best possible mental state and be able to work with the students and have a good day and still go back home safely.” In this case, the dean was concerned with the aftereffect on the instructor.

Several deans talked about different strategies for delivering difficult or unpopular information. One dean said it was important to allow the faculty to have the opportunity to express displeasure at the news: “If they don’t like it, it’s important to let them unload. You know, let ’em let the ugly out of the bag, and you can kind of just hear it out.” Another talked about showing the faculty that she was working alongside them to understand the unpopular policies coming from above. Still another dean explained that a significant challenge is deciding if and when to convey difficult information:

A lot of times upper management will be very Chicken Little, you know. And so the sky’s always falling. Then it immediately gets conveyed to us, and I think part of our role is to synthesize that level of anxiety and say, okay, is this something I
really want pass down and get everyone’s knickers in a knot? You know, am I going to pick this this hill to die on, so to speak?

This dean explained that part of the dean’s job is constantly to receive information from above, to interpret it, and to decide if it should be passed along to the faculty.

*Communicating to motivate.* Another aspect of the competency of communication that came up in individual interviews was *communicating to motivate.* While this wasn’t mentioned as often as other aspects of communication, several deans stressed its importance. One part of communicating to motivate is recognizing and praising faculty and staff for the work they have done well. Some deans mentioned this as something they work on constantly. One dean described it as being important but also something she needs to work on even more: “Demonstration of respect for the work that’s being done—here I’m saying I don’t know if I’m communicating the recognition enough.”

Other deans mentioned that a primary facet of motivating is communicating with faculty to encourage them to do the best job possible. One dean put it this way:

> I think if I can motivate and involve faculty and staff into whatever we do, it’s always the best scenario under any circumstances. As much as possible, I value everybody’s input and try not to be the talking head. That’s very important because I believe most of our role is communication and being able to communicate for their success.

The faculty’s main role in a community college is teaching, so it follows that a dean communicates in a way that will motivate the instructional staff to teach to their fullest potential. This same dean mentioned Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton as models of leaders skillful in their ability to motivate. This dean described public speaking as an art,
one that has the potential to “energize” people toward better work, and she saw this as part of her role as a communicator.

**Knowing whom to include and who requires follow through.** A different aspect of communication that came up in individual interviews is *knowing whom to include and who requires follow through*. This pertains both to written and oral communication but was often discussed in relation to the former. Several deans mentioned the common dilemma of deciding whom to include in an email or other written communication. Should one include one’s immediate supervisor? How about the Academic Senate president? The chair of the Curriculum Committee? All the other deans? While these questions may seem simple from the outside, they are sometimes surprisingly political. One interview respondent described his frustration with this: “Every time I send an e-mail I think, ‘Who needs to be part of this e-mail?’ Undoubtedly I’ve left off someone who should have been included, or who should be at least copied or something. I don’t know what to do about it, but that’s the one that’s a challenge.” Often it’s a matter of knowing which constituency group(s) to keep informed. Should the department chairs be involved in this discussion that was started by the vice president? If so, when? How much information should be passed along to them? As one can see, this aspect of communication is closely related to transparency.

This aspect of communication is also related to collaboration, and this point was discussed in the focus-group interview. Several participants drew a connection between clear communication and collaboration. One dean asserted that you cannot have the latter without the former. He said, “I put communication first because that’s the first thing you
have to accomplish and then collaboration, because you collaborate through that communication, that skill.” Knowing whom to communicate with is part of the act of collaboration.

Another part of this is follow through, winding up communications so that all parties have a record of what has been discussed or agreed upon and can determine that the discussion has been finished. One dean referred to this process as “closing loops”:

As an instructor, I was in charge of my own little fiefdom, and so I wouldn’t have to often close loops—I could make a decision and kind of roll with it. But now I have to remember to remind everyone, “Okay this is where we were, and now this is what’s happened....”

This act of tying up a conversation is related to the similar act of documenting an event or behavior, which comes into play, for instance, when needing to record an instructor’s actions if they will be used in an evaluation or disciplinary process and/or for student discipline. Careful and accurate documentation can be very important and in this sense is closely related to clarity in communication.

Method. Still another aspect of this AACC competency that deans spoke about was the method of communication. Several methods were mentioned. For instance, one dean lamented how she had needed to be more patient and questioning but instead had been too dictatorial and abrupt: “How I communicated back then was another big weakness. ‘You need to do this, you need to do that,’ instead of saying, ‘Well, how do you think this should be done?’ or ‘What do you all think about how this should be done?’ I think I was a little bit abrupt back then.” Another talked about being able to “curb impulses,” meaning not jumping to conclusions too quickly and overreacting. Several deans mentioned taking time to communicate, allowing enough time to for all
voices to be heard, for those with whom they are communicating to feel comfortable with the process.

However, the deans in initial interviews mentioned, more than any other method, the value of one-on-one or face-to-face communication. One dean explained, “I try to avoid email because it can be misinterpreted—just too much room for misunderstanding, so it’s one-on-one talking, speaking to them, listening to what they’re saying. And doing it in a way so it’s not threatening.” Some deans spoke about the fact that one-on-one communication increased their ability to clarify their points; one dean mentioned that a face-to-face meeting with one or more people produced more creative conversation and was beneficial for problem solving. Yet another dean saw it as a time saving measure in contrast to emails or phone calls that require back and forth responses that may take hours or days to finish. Several deans mentioned the importance of getting out of the office to talk with the faculty. One dean explained,

I think what is important for any good manager, and probably even more important for someone who’s come up from the ranks of faculty, is still walking around in your area and talking to the colleagues that you shared so much time with, on a personal level. Just the “Hello. How are you doing?” “How’s your daughter? Is she liking college?” “How’s the son? How’s the mom and dad?”

This dean explained that, in general, it is harder for one person to be angry with another if they see each other often and communicate. In a questionnaire response, one dean put it this way, “For me, individual relationships are the bedrock for good communication and this happens best one-on-one.”

*Attentive listening.* One-on-one communication is also closely linked to the most common and most strongly emphasized aspect of communication that the deans
discussed: attentive listening. One dean thought this aspect is particularly important because of the amount of time a dean is required to listen. She said, “The amount of listening I’m doing now as compared to when I was a faculty member is just night and day.” This is something faculty don’t necessarily recognize, and this realization may be even more accentuated, given that a common mode for faculty is to deliver information rather than taking it in.

Deans offered several benefits of and purposes for attentive listening. First and foremost, the deans talked about how careful listening helped in learning and understanding about a given situation. One dean mentioned that good listening was simply a positive way of getting input. Another took it further, however: “Be listening to the voices, and know if there are underlying concerns. Don’t just brush them aside or put them under the rug and be ready to move on.” Other deans commented as well on the fact that attentive listening offers a dean an opportunity to learn, to comprehend an issue in a more thorough way. One noted, “I think they can learn from their faculty but also learn from their colleagues in administration.”

One dean felt so passionately about this sub-competency of listening that she explained how she envisions it as a very active kind of phenomenon:

I said listen, listen to people. I mean, I can physically and emotionally feel the difference when I don’t want to listen and then I just kind of have to say to myself, “Okay, now you just have to give into this and just really try to be in the thing, really turn to the person and try to just listen.” It’s really easy for me not to do it, to just hear what they’re saying, and just go, “Yeah, that’s too bad....”

This dean brings up a valuable point, that attentive listening is not always easy or enjoyable and that it involves more than sitting with someone else and being exposed to
their words. Another dean emphasizes this point as well, explaining that effective
listening to her is really *hearing* what the other person is saying:

> [Listening] is a really useful skill in these jobs, too—to be able to really have that
> back and forth, or really be able to hear what people are saying and understand
> that it doesn’t matter if I don’t see it that way, it doesn’t matter if I don’t like what
> they’re saying. They’re asking me for something or they’re telling me something,
> and I have to try to really use my problem solving skills to see if I can help
> facilitate it.

This quality of good listening, the ability to really hear what somebody else is telling you,
is closely related to the benefit of learning as an active listener. This was the most
common benefit mentioned by deans. However, one dean also mentioned that attentive
listening was necessary simply because some faculty and staff need it. She explained that
she did not listen enough when she first became a dean: “I sometimes didn’t give them
the time they needed. And the needier they were, the more time I now know you just
simply *have* to give. And in the beginning I was impatient with that.”

Other deans mentioned additional benefits of attentive listening, particularly that
being a good listener earns them credibility in the eyes of faculty and staff. One dean
explains, “My guess would be that my reputation is to be very calm and evenhanded.
And fair. And I think part of that comes from being a good listener.” A different dean
described listening as “keeping [his] professionalism.” Yet another dean explained that
improving her listening skills helped her in other aspects of her life, that moving away
from her former impatient tendencies and toward being a better listener has made her a
better communicator overall.

Regardless of specific benefits, many deans felt that active listening was an
important part of the competency of communication. When asked in individual
interviews to describe themselves as the best dean they can be, two deans mentioned listening as a key component. One said, “I was the best dean I could be because I really do have to listen to what other people have to say and I have to reflect on their language.” The other dean mentioned “listening and professionalism” as the keys to performing his best. A notable point in interviews was that the deans considered listening a critical part of their communication skills, equal to or more important than any other aspect. This was corroborated in the dean’s questionnaire when eight out of the ten deans identified listening as one aspect of communication they consider most important in their position. One put it simply, “Listening well is the fastest way to build trust.” Several other deans, as well, linked the act of listening well to the ability of a dean to build trust.

Connection and overlap of AACC competencies. In stage one personal interviews, the ten deans in this study were given the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders (2005) as well as a summary of the AACC document (Wallin, 2012, pp. 22-23) and were asked to rank the six competencies in order of importance for their job as a dean. (See Appendix A.) Although the data from that question were very useful for determining how important they felt the competencies were, nearly every dean mentioned that ranking the competencies was difficult because they overlapped or connected in ways that made them challenging to differentiate and isolate as discrete skills. One dean said, “I saw some overlap, so it was difficult for me to say one versus two versus three on some of these.” A different dean mentioned why she found the task of ranking the competencies so challenging for her: “I thought that was the most challenging question, and I wasn’t sure that I could actually rate them as a
hierarchical set. I thought of them more as being spokes on a wheel.” Still another dean put it this way: “I couldn’t separate them out in importance. You really need to have all of those in place in some form or fashion.”

The deans’ difficulty in ranking the competencies is understandable given the language in the competencies document itself. One descriptor for professionalism, for instance, is “Understand and endorse the history, philosophy, and culture of the community college” (AACC, 2005, p. 7). That descriptor could easily be applied to the competency of community college advocacy. Under the competency of collaboration, we find the descriptor “Embrace and employ the diversity of individuals, cultures, values, ideas, and communication styles” (AACC, 2005, p. 6), showing a clear connection between collaboration and communication. One descriptor under organizational strategy mentions “align[ing] organizational mission, structures, and resources with the college master plan” (AACC, 2005, p. 5), linking that competency to resource management.

The most common connections between competencies the deans mentioned were between professionalism and communication and between collaboration and communication. About the former, one dean explained her ranking: “Professionalism for me would be number five, but it’s obviously number one, too. It’s part of communication to me. It’s how we present ourselves and being ethical and telling the truth.” Four different deans talked about the connection between communication and collaboration. One said that collaboration “gives you credibility as a communicator” while another dean referred to those two competencies as being “very hand in hand.”
The overlapping and connecting of the AACC competencies, both in the AACC document and in the deans’ ranking of them, does not suggest any failing of those competencies. Rather it suggests the complexity of them, and, for this study, the complexity of the competency model for community college deans.

**Subquestion #3.** The third subquestion for this study asked, “What other competencies do successful deans in this situation exhibit?” The AACC Competencies, with numerous descriptors for each, cover a broad range of leadership traits, skills, and behaviors. However, the deans in this study did mention some competencies that were not featured in the AACC document. These competencies may have appeared as part of one descriptor or another in the AACC document, but because they were mentioned as “other” competencies in the individual interviews, focus group interview, and/or survey of deans, it was possible to isolate them as discreet competencies that the deans believed were important for success in their position. They may not have been mentioned by every dean, but they were mentioned often enough and in multiple stages of data gathering to be noticeably important.

**Humility.** One competency or characteristic that deans indicated was important in all three stages of data gathering was humility. Of the ten deans interviewed, four mentioned this trait in individual interviews. When asked how she could be the best dean possible, one dean explained, “That would mean, for me, being humble enough to recognize that there are always going to be things that I don’t know, that I need to learn, that there are certain things beyond my control.” A different dean said, “Actually, one of the things that worked really well in communication was admitting that I was wrong.”
Still another dean explained that moving into the position of dean from the faculty ranks is inevitably humbling: “Most of us have reached a certain level of expertise in our former careers, and [moving into the dean position] you get kind of knocked to your knees. You need to recognize that will happen and give yourself a break.” This last point is worth emphasizing since deans who had been faculty were viewed as experts in their former positions. They held the information or skills in their field and were responsible for determining if students were also becoming competent in those areas. Moving into a dean position where many things are new can be quite humbling.

Several respondents in the stage 3 questionnaire for deans mentioned humility or a closely related trait. One mentioned that forgiveness is particularly important, explaining, “It’s important to be able to start fresh when a situation goes awry.” Another dean tied the concept of humility to ethics and stated, “Ethics are extremely important as well as having the courage to address difficult and delicate situations with humanity and humility.” Another subcategory of humility is compassion, and this came up in the focus group interview. One dean said, “If you’re any good at these positions I think your capacity for compassion increases. If you’re any good at all.” Another dean agreed, “Kindness, a little bit of empathy at the right moment, you just solve a huge number of problems.”

**Fairness.** In addition to humility, deans emphasized fairness as being important in the position. In his individual interview, one dean stressed the importance of this competency even when it’s especially difficult: “In terms of running your division, you can’t afford to have grudges as a dean. You have to be able to be professional and fair
and maybe even more than fair with people, even those that, you know, are difficult for you.” Several deans talked about fairness in the context of faculty or staff perceiving their actions or decisions as unfair. This was expressed as a concern or difficulty of the job. During the focus group interview, too, one dean mentioned the difficulty of being fair: “The faculty have unreasonable or uncomfortable expectations of you, and it is difficult to be (or to appear to be) fair.” However, one dean explained that what is most important is for her to try to be fair despite any perceptions from faculty: “As long as I myself am okay with how I’m trying to make everything fair, then it’s okay. You know, I can go to sleep at night.” In the survey question asking deans to identify “other” competencies that are important in their jobs, four deans mentioned fairness. Three of these deans mentioned that a dean should model fair behavior or act as an example for faculty in their area. One explained that he saw it as his responsibility “to model fair, unbiased and responsible behavior and a work ethic that reflects the goals and values of the institution.” While making fair decisions and behaving in a fair manner may appear to be a given for a dean, this competency takes on particular importance in an arena of competing interests and the easy conclusion for faculty to view the dean’s decisions as favoring one interest or another.

**Building relationships.** Another competency of importance to the deans was the ability to build relationships. In individual interviews, this competency was expressed in several different ways. One dean described her open-door policy and her habit of bringing food and flowers into the office to create a more pleasant atmosphere and more positive interactions with the faculty in her area, interactions that aren’t focused on
business or problems. Another dean talked about trying to give faculty the benefit of the doubt while still another mentioned building a trusting environment.

This competency arose as important in the focus group interview as well. One dean discussed the importance of taking walks around her division and dropping in on instructors to talk. She emphasized that these drop-in visits weren’t always about work but rather about any casual day-to-day matters about which they both might be interested:

I do build a series of interactions that don’t just occur when they [the faculty members] are coming in to complain about something or that they’re upset about something. And so there’s something more than that. One of my strengths, I think, is being able to establish a trusting environment. It’s kind of like a magnet; it draws people back.

Some of the deans described this benefit of maintaining personal relationships as “building personal equity.” This concept came up in the focus group as well. One dean described the act of reaching out to faculty to create personal contact as “making a deposit.” Another dean agreed that making these deposits is important because “it [the good will] can go away quickly.” Still another dean described it as an enjoyable part of the job: “It’s fun. You need people you never thought you would need. You really have to watch how you talk to everybody.” That point gets to the focus of “building equity” by maintaining personal relationships. Because a dean is nearly always in a position of making decisions that will displease some people, having that “equity” or good will in the bank, so to speak, will enable the dean to maintain stability around difficult issues.

*Understanding college processes and culture.* An additional competency deans mentioned was that of understanding college processes and culture. A number of deans expressed a desire to have known more about how the college functions when they first
came into the position. One dean put it simply: “It may have helped to have had some
more background on how the college itself works.” Another dean echoed that idea:
“How do you do a budget? What’s a schedule? What are the rules around scheduling? I
mean, the more times you unpeel the onion, it’s just like you can’t believe all the little
things.” These deans talked about needing some training in these technical aspects of the
job before coming into the position or early in their tenure as deans. During the focus
group interview, one dean referred to college processes as the mechanics of the job and
lamented how deans weren’t given training in this area:

I think we could do a better job training our deans. When I showed up the first
day, it was “Here’s your office.” That’s all I knew. “Here’s a requisition, sign it.”
I thought, “What is this? Where does this go?” So, to me, the mechanics of the
job would have been really helpful.

This dean also went on to explain that he would like to have known how to access the
data he needed to make good decisions. He said he had no preparation about that.

The deans also mentioned needing to understand the culture of the college. One
dean referred to that as the “organizational context and history” and said that you can use
that knowledge to improve in the position. He noted, “You don’t want to fight against
that history, you want to use it to take you where you need to go.” Other deans
mentioned other specific aspects of process or history as being important—how to
participate in the accreditation process, how to manage one’s budgets, how to purchase,
and how to evaluate faculty and staff. Lack of knowledge about the details of the job was
a common theme, contributing to the reason the deans felt it was important to have that
knowledge. Only one dean volunteered that he came into the position feeling confident
about his skills in such areas.
**Knowledge of instruction.** To explore possible competencies, deans were asked in their first-stage interviews, “Do you believe there is a connection between being a good teacher and being an effective dean?” Responses to this question varied from deans who were adamant that teaching experience was a requisite for anyone becoming a dean to respondents who simply saw a connection between the skills needed for both jobs. Both open and axial coding of responses to this question and to data from questions in the focus group and questionnaires revealed that both deans and faculty saw a strong connection between teaching and being a dean. However, many of the competencies related to that connection could be identified in the other competencies already mentioned in this study, particularly communication. For example, one dean explained that as a dean “you have to unpack sometimes difficult or complex information for people, so those skills I think you use when you teach....” Most of the other deans mentioned various aspects of communication as a common competency between teaching and serving as a dean. A few deans also saw a commonality between teaching and being a dean in that both positions focus on fulfilling others’ needs, the instructors with students and deans with faculty and staff.

A slightly different competency, however, that came about from that question is the competency of knowing about instruction, a dean’s knowledge of instructional practices, and even, in some cases, a dean’s content knowledge. One dean made a point that having had classroom experience and a solid understanding of what happens in the classroom allows him to better serve instructors. He said, “To the extent that I came from the faculty ranks and I understand the classroom environment from which they come, it
allows me to serve them better. It allows me to deal with the problems that they bring to
me with a great deal more understanding.” Sometimes the issues faculty contend with
come from higher levels of administration at the college or district—or even policy or
law from the legislature. One dean commented that her knowledge of the classroom
helped her assist the faculty with issues or initiatives that come from higher ranks:

I understand what it’s like to be a teacher. I know what it’s like to be in the
classroom. So when the district decides ABC, which I think doesn’t have very
much to do with being in the classroom, often, or the state rolls out some new
edict, I think I can use my collaborative skills to work with faculty to help them
implement those things that would be useful to them with their students, because I
understand what it’s like to be in the classroom and I know what it’s like to be a
student.

Similarly, another dean said that his knowledge of instruction gave him a better
perspective in prioritizing what faculty should be working on.

Still another respondent mentioned that knowing what motivates instructors (and
what does not) helps her to motivate the faculty in her area in any effort to improve
practices in the classroom. A different dean commented on how having been an
instructor for many years gave her a comfort level with students and with faculty, which
is particularly helpful when working with students complaining about their class or
instructor. This competency was echoed by faculty in their questionnaire, one instructor
saying, “Good deans should always have their finger on the pulse of the students whom
they serve and what better way than to come from an instructional background?”

Overall, faculty saw a strong connection between being a good teacher and being an
effective dean. (Question 4 in Appendix D asked specifically about this.) Here are a few
of their comments directly related to the competency of a dean’s knowledge about instruction:

- A good dean must know about and encourage good teaching and learning to run an effective division.
- Being a teacher that understands the job of teaching, the challenges and rewards, and collegiality as well as what a student-centered approach to teaching looks like are more important if someone is to become a dean.
- A familiarity with what goes on in the classroom—as well as some familiarity with what constitutes “good teaching”—may be a requirement for an “effective dean.”
- Absolutely, faculty perspective translates to the best decisions for our students.
- A dean must understand how classrooms work. They are not businesses....

The faculty emphasized other aspects of the dean/instructor connection—communication, management skills—but a strong emphasis was in regard to a dean’s ability to understand what happens in the classroom. For that reason, it would not be correct to say that a dean must have been a classroom instructor; however, knowledge of what happens in the classroom, knowledge of the student population, knowledge of effective instructional practices, and knowledge of emerging pedagogy do constitute a competency for being an effective dean. That knowledge will help the dean serve the faculty and the college.

**Vision/strategic thinking.** In their individual interviews, several deans mentioned strategic thinking or visioning as an important competency for their position. Articulating a vision is mentioned as part of two of the AACC competencies, communication (2005, p. 5) and professionalism (2005, p. 6), but the deans in this study mentioned it often enough as a discreet competency to discuss it here as such. Most of
the time, the deans discussed strategic thinking in the context of not having enough time to do it, of being occupied by day-to-day tasks so that there is very little time left for coming up with or projecting a vision. One dean explained, “So much is solving the problem that’s right in front of us, but the reason the problem exists has to do with more of a strategic kind of thing that I hardly ever have enough time to do.” The irony she explained was that if she had more time for strategic thinking, she would perhaps have answers to the problem that needs to be dealt with immediately. This frustration came up in the focus group interview as well. One dean lamented, “I would like to be able to engage in creating a broader vision and providing a broader direction to some of the things that we’re doing, but we’re so bogged down with day-to-day stuff, especially in the larger divisions, that it’s almost impossible and actually gets very frustrating at times.”

Other deans saw this competency as being important in its own right, a fundamental aspect of the job. One dean said that in managing her budget and her class schedule, she finds herself “looking for trends or patterns, which I did somewhat before, but now I think I do it more regularly and naturally.” Another dean emphasized the importance of looking beyond the daily task: “I’m a big-picture person. I like to say like ‘Why are we doing this?’” Still another dean ties strategic thinking to the concept of creativity and helping faculty to do their work: “What I really like to do very much is work in the realm of ideas and get creative, think out of the box, try things, work to try to accomplish goals with new programs, implementing new ideas, getting other people excited.” This same dean noted that deans need to “stay on top of things” in order to be
change agents in support of faculty. Without the knowledge one has by staying informed of trends in higher education and within the disciplines, he asserted, “you’re not going to have that vision.”

Seven different deans mentioned the importance of strategic thinking or vision in their individual interviews. In the focus group discussion, the topic came up, too, one dean asserting, “If you don’t have a good grasp of where you’re going, then it’s really hard to provide leadership.” In the survey question asking deans for “other” competencies, one dean tied the concept of vision to providing inspiration, advocating for “leadership that inspires members to think outside the box and encourages creativity.” Whether deans were frustrated about this aspect of their position, at not having time for strategic thinking, or whether they saw it as a normal and critical part of their job, most deans in the study mentioned its importance.

**Subquestion #4.** The fourth and last subquestion in this study asked, “How would a faculty member, aspiring to lead, best prepare for such a role?” The three stages of data collection led to four overall areas of preparation that faculty should consider if they are interested in pursuing a position as dean: (a) preparing psychologically, (b) getting experience, (c) knowing what you’re getting into, and (d) having a plan. These four areas relate to each other and overlap, yet the data suggest they can be observed as discreet methods of preparation as well. Figure 5 illustrates these four main ways a faculty member can prepare for the dean position.
Preparing psychologically. One common aspect of preparation that deans mentioned faculty should undergo is to prepare psychologically for what the position will hold for them. In their individual interviews, the deans mentioned several things related to the position for which faculty would want to mentally prepare. Here are a few:

- Be prepared to be scrutinized.
- Be prepared to change and grow.
- Ask yourself if you’re ready not to teach.
- You will be lonelier in your job.
- Never take things personally.
- Prepare to be humbled.
What do these points of advice (almost warnings) for faculty suggest? At the very least, they suggest that faculty moving to the dean’s office will experience something very different from what they have experienced in the classroom. One dean commented on the need for a faculty member to be ready to be humbled; another asserted that her best advice was never to take things personally and be prepared that “others are going to see things differently than you.” Still another dean mentioned that it can be hard not to use the expertise of one’s discipline in the classroom and as a scholar. Several deans also mentioned that faculty members often develop much of their identity as teachers and academics. When they move into administration, this aspect of their identity gets lost or is at least diminished. Sometimes that fact is not apparent until the person has already become a dean, but it’s worthy of preparing for. In the focus group interview, one dean said that it’s challenging to help others understand your new role but even before that one must “really internalize that you are in a different role and understand it.” If a dean’s identity is so fully associated with being a teacher or a member of the faculty, that dean may struggle to some degree when losing that identity as a dean.

Another participant discussed the fact that a dean, by virtue of the position, receives much more attention and much more scrutiny than does a faculty member. A dean’s decisions and behavior are observed by many people—faculty, staff, other managers—and that is something for which faculty need to be prepared. He said, “As a dean, you are on display. Everything you do has a consequence beyond your desk.” This dean went on to emphasize that a dean’s actions will be discussed and judged by others while a dean’s ability to judge or scrutinize a faculty member’s performance is limited by
our culture of academic freedom. Another dean mentioned that the dean position is not a good job for anyone who needs to be loved by those around him or her. She posited that this is the case for some faculty, who are excellent instructors adored by students. She put it plainly: “Don’t take the job if you need everybody to love you.”

Some participants in their initial interviews talked about the need for a dean to have a keen self-awareness, and that self-reflection would be part of the way a faculty member would prepare for a move to the dean position. One dean commented about her own experience of becoming a dean, saying, “I wish I had just been more aware of what traits I had.” She went on to explain that as we grow as people and in our careers we have “a kind of toolbox” of skills and traits that we develop to address any number of situations that deans face; however, we don’t always realize what tools we have, and only later in our careers are we thoughtfully able to choose our strategies for addressing those situations. Another dean reflected on her style of managing when she first became dean and her inclination then of moving quickly to action: “I think now if I’d been aware that this was a pretty major transition, I might have slowed myself down a little bit to pay a little more attention instead of just doing.” Both of these deans suggest that reflecting upon one’s leadership traits and on one’s ways of interacting with people in general can be a valuable way of preparing for a move to the dean position. One dean in the focus group discussion put it simply, “This is a hard transition if you’re not ready for it.” Preparing psychologically for the position can be one valuable way of trying to make that transition smoother.
The need for this kind of preparation was also suggested in the stage 3 survey of deans in their response to the question number 6 about which areas of the position faculty lack understanding. The most common responses were (a) the degree of influence or power the dean has (7 out of 10) and (b) what the dean does on a day-to-day basis (7 out of 10). This lack of faculty understanding as perceived by the deans could suggest that deans will be surprised by the emotional reality of the position.

**Getting experience.** One of the most common kinds of preparation that the deans in this study recommended for faculty interested in the dean position is to get experience with activities that offer leadership experience. Common suggestions offered in the first round interviews were to join campus committees (preferably in a leadership role), to become department chair, and to get involved in professional organizations. One dean referred to this as faculty “investing in themselves.” He described the value of this “investment” in this way:

So I would say invest in yourself by participating on other committees and other forums the college has to offer or even the district for that matter which will not only put you in a position to meet more people, learn new things, but it’s also going to put you in a position where you’re not comfortable.

His premise here is that being in positions that make one uncomfortable would prepare a faculty member for the inevitable uncomfortable situations encountered as a dean. The committee work would also introduce faculty to many people and issues they might encounter as a dean, thereby easing the transition to the position.

During the focus group interview, deans discussed this aspect of preparing for the position. One dean offered that he thought serving on the Curriculum Committee and/or the Academic Senate was particularly useful because these groups offered faculty
members a broader view of the college and its processes. Another agreed that work on the Academic Senate, especially as president, would be of value because the faculty member would have to “put up with a lot of nonsense from colleagues...[which could] make a person stronger and more ready to transition to a leadership role in administration.” The group concurred that this experience could convince a person whether going into administration is a good decision or not. Several respondents in the dean survey mentioned much the same suggestion, that faculty should be active on campus and join committees that will help them transition to the dean role.

Several deans also mentioned that they felt some form of job shadowing would give prospective deans valuable experience. One dean mentioned that he felt as if he had been thrown into the job without a very clear concept of what he was getting into. Another dean remarked, “I would say the thing I really would have like, and that I still feel every person coming into the job should have as an opportunity, is job shadowing.” This dean said it would have been very helpful if she could have sat down with a current dean and watched as that dean held a difficult conversation with a faculty or staff member. Another dean recommended that faculty who are considering the job should just go around and talk with as many deans as possible to get a sense of what the job will be and what their major experiences and concerns are. Regardless of the particular model, informal talks or formal mentorship or job shadowing, several deans felt this was an important way for faculty to prepare for the position.

Knowing what you’re getting into. This means of preparation, like the first, preparing psychologically, is related to the concept of awareness about the job; however,
this preparation is less about the psychological reality of the job and more about aspects that faculty simply may have thought about—some logistical, some about relationships, some about lifestyle. For instance, one dean in her individual interview mentioned that prospective deans need to know that their schedule will no longer be their own. This was mentioned by several others, too. Faculty applying for a dean position frequently do not have a clear idea about how their calendar will be occupied by meetings for a large part of every day and that, while at a meeting, more will be put on their calendar by their administrative assistant. They may not know that on a given day they will intend to do A, B, and C yet never get to any of those activities because of other tasks required by their supervisor. This can be a surprise to someone who controls almost all of his or her schedule.

Another dean mentioned that faculty should be aware that other administrators can make a dean’s job difficult. Although ideally all administrators at the college are on the same page in terms of how to implement the institution’s mission and goals, it’s not uncommon for one or more administrators to create work that a given dean may not want to support. A higher-level administrator might also put the dean in a precarious position with the faculty in the dean’s area. The dean is stuck in the position of wanting to support the faculty but having to support the higher-level administrator. A dean in the focus group interview said, “The president, the vice president—they have responsibilities and oftentimes it falls to us to actually execute on those. You have to do it and smile.” These complex situations are often not perceived by faculty, and this is something the deans mentioned in their responses to the survey question about what aspects of the job
faculty do not understand, six out of the ten deans saying that faculty do not understand the interactions deans have with faculty colleagues and administrative colleagues.

Deans also mentioned that faculty should know if they become deans they will have to choose which issues they believe are most important and which aren’t important enough to struggle with. In the dean survey, one respondent said, “Have the patience to know that you will not win all the battles and learn to pick where to make your stands.” This bit of advice can be especially helpful because new deans often want to give every request or duty equal importance without knowing that doing so is nearly impossible.

**Having a plan.** A significant thread of discussion that came about during the focus group interview was centered on one additional kind of preparation that faculty should consider if moving to a dean position: generating a plan, purpose, vision, or focus for what to do in the position. One dean indicated that it would be helpful for a faculty member to ask him- or herself what kind of dean he or she intends to be:

If you’re a caretaker dean, that’s one thing. I don’t mean to demean that at all, but that’s a certain set of skills. But if you are an advocate for change and you want to push the system and change different processes, that’s a whole other set of skills. Both have value. So it really depends on why are you taking the job. What’s your purpose?

This dean went on to explain that, in his opinion, having a clear sense of purpose and understanding clearly what kind of dean you will be enables a new dean to handle difficult situations he or she will encounter. He said, “You’re going to get slammed if you don’t have a reference point for yourself.” Other deans agreed that conducting an honest assessment of oneself, asking the reasons one wants to move into the dean position, is of great value. All in the focus group readily agreed that an increase in salary
is not a good reason to move into the position. However, ironically and importantly, six faculty members in their narrative comments in the faculty survey mentioned “higher pay” or something equivalent as a motivator for faculty moving into the dean position. This was a significant response given that higher pay was not listed as an option for them to choose. This discrepancy in how faculty and deans in the study viewed motivation for moving into the position—deans agreeing that higher pay is a poor reason to become dean, faculty thinking it’s a common reason—makes having a clear purpose or plan for one’s work as a dean all the more important.

Although many deans mentioned the importance of having a clear vision for their division, some also expressed frustration with this, indicating that the busy-ness of their jobs made it difficult to lead their faculty in larger plans. In his individual interview, one dean said he felt he was being his best as a dean when he could provide a vision for the people he leads—but that he felt his college as a whole failed at encouraging such leadership. A different dean noted,

I will focus on the parts of the job that are attainable, achievable, but I also resent the fact that I spend so much time on that. What I’d really like to do very much is work in the realm of ideas and get creative, think out of the box, try new programs, implement new ideas...

This dean and others in the focus group felt that this fact of the position, that one will be occupied by routine tasks, makes it all the more important to have a clear concept of what one wants to do as a dean prior to applying for the job. Without such a plan or vision—even in a vague sense—one might become too enmeshed in the day-to-day to see clearly with a larger focus.
**Polishing specific skills.** A few of the deans in this study recommended that faculty work on specific skills to prepare for the job. One dean recommended that faculty work on time management. Another recommended that prospective deans should hone their communication skills, both verbal and written. Another dean said that faculty should develop strong listening skills. However, these recommendations—made in response to the faculty survey question asking the deans’ advice for faculty considering the job—were not mentioned by more than one dean. While they tie nicely to the AACC competencies discussed earlier in this chapter, working to improve these skills was not mentioned in either individual interviews or the focus group as a way to prepare for the position. In fact, one dean said that she wouldn’t want to hire a new dean who needed to work on such skills. She said, “I’m sort of looking at people who are preparing even though they’re not necessarily thinking that they’re preparing.” She went on to say that good faculty prospects have done this by being on the right committees and engaging themselves in the college in the right ways. Her point suggests that participation, college-wide awareness, awareness of the position, and awareness of oneself—as discussed as the previous means of preparation—are the ways faculty can best prepare to be a dean.

**Context for model of competencies: a dean’s challenges.** The central research question for this study asked, “What are the advantages as well as the challenges faced by community college deans when supervising, managing, and leading colleagues from the same division in which they taught, and what competencies increase their chances to succeed in this circumstance?” The first part of this question was addressed earlier in response to subquestion number one. The second part of this central question leads to
one of the major outcomes for this study, a model of competencies for community
college deans who supervise the faculty with whom they had once been colleagues.
However, the model of competencies that has emerged does not exist in isolation.
Neither individual competencies nor the group of competencies can accurately be viewed
outside of the context of challenges that deans face. Often, the competencies are a means
of directly responding to the challenges; if not, the challenges present a backdrop for the
competencies. That is why a dean’s challenges are part of the conceptual framework for
this study. (See Figure 1, page 6.) The following pages present some of the main
challenges that emerged in all stages of data gathering.

**Challenge: assisting faculty in change.** One challenge deans face is moving
faculty toward change, particularly when the faculty resist the change. One dean in his
individual interview explained, “It’s hard to get them to listen, and it’s going to be even
harder to have them accept. I don’t care if they don’t like it, but, on the other hand, I do
need their cooperation.” Another dean mentioned working with faculty who have been
doing their jobs in the same way for a long time and who just aren’t interested in
adjusting their methods: “Sometimes you get folks that are just really entrenched in the
way they are. If you get somebody that’s burnt out in the classroom, it’s hard to get them
to come around.” A different dean put this reluctance in the context of “long-standing
traditions that are hard to move people off of.” Still another dean discussed his view that,
despite his appreciation for the need to collaborate, too much collaboration is something
that kills change. He said, “You involve everybody in everything, and nothing gets
done.”
In the stage three survey for deans, one respondent mentioned the need for a dean to show “leadership that inspires members to think outside the box” while another dean professed the importance of “pro-activeness” in working with faculty. At the same time, however, comments in the first two stages of data collection showed how difficult this can be. One dean in the focus group interview mentioned how hard it is to get some faculty to accept change, “Some people like it, some people don’t; some get it, some of them don’t. You can’t decide anything without somebody feeling like somebody’s ox is getting gored for making changes.” Another dean put this challenge in the context of academic freedom, the faculty sometimes thinking that they have the right (backed by their expertise) not to change. Regardless of exactly how this reluctance for change manifests itself, it is a context for the competencies the deans need to perform well in the position.

**Challenge: the previous dean.** Five different deans in this study mentioned that working in the context of the person who had previously held the position presented challenges. This situation presented either expectations in the minds of the faculty and/or of the dean, or it presented obstacles based on how the previous dean functioned in the position. One dean mentioned how the faculty in his area were angry at administration partly because of the self-aggrandizement shown by the prior dean and the favoritism that person showed toward certain instructors. This dean said, “A lot of what I did was deliberately to be not what she was. That was a guiding principle for me.” A different dean said when she first took the position she had become “collateral damage” because as a “good soldier” who minded her own business she became associated with the former
dean in the eyes of the other faculty, and they had had an adversarial relationship with that dean. Still another dean mentioned that the dean who held the job before her “had divided and conquered,” and she saw that as having presented an atmosphere to overcome as well as an opportunity to instill a trusting environment that contrasted with the situation her predecessor had left. One other participant said that she came into her position understanding that she just had a different style than the prior person. Of course, a dean coming into his or her position from outside the division would also be entering in the context of the previous dean. However, deans advancing from faculty positions within the same division may have a stronger awareness or sensitivity to that context since they too experienced it alongside all the other faculty and staff in the division.

*Challenge: getting the work done.* A common theme in the stage one interviews was that deans struggled with the volume of work in their positions and had difficulty keeping up with the day-to-day processes of the job. One dean explained how transitioning from faculty into the dean role was difficult:

> It was kind of frustrating for me because before I could close my office door and go from A to B, just bang out a bunch of work. And now I could never do that. Everything’s done incrementally because everyone’s coming in. They say, “Do you have just a sec?” And it’s never a second, of course. So everyone wants a chunk of your time.

Other deans, too, mentioned being consumed by the detail work associated with the job. One said, “I wish I had more skill to be able to create more time for the important stuff.” Other deans echoed this “wish” as well. In fact, several of the deans mentioned this challenge in the context of answering the stage one interview question about skills, traits,
or competencies they wish they had had when they first started as a dean. During the focus group, one dean explained,

That’s one of the most frustrating things about my job. I would like to be able to engage in creating a broader vision and providing a broader direction to some of the things that we’re doing, but we’re so bogged down with day-to-day stuff, especially in the larger divisions, that it’s almost impossible and actually gets very frustrating at times.

A few deans indicated that they anticipated the demands of the job to get only worse. They said they foresaw more being asked of deans as a result of new initiatives and increased accountability in many aspects of their jobs. One dean put it simply in her interview: “You know, I think we are probably going to be called upon to do more.” In a narrative survey response, another participant agreed that this challenge is greater more now than ever: “This is even truer now as more and more is demanded of us in an environment of diminishing resources and deficiencies of leadership at the upper levels of management.” The particular reasons for being time challenged as a result of the volume of work differed from dean to dean, but it was mentioned in one way or another by many of the deans in the study.

**Challenge: work/life balance.** The challenge of getting the work done is related to another common challenge articulated by participants, that of balancing demands of the position with other life obligations. In individual interviews, one dean mentioned that the job “just consumes you” while another mentioned the need to be able to just “turn a switch” and be with family one hundred percent. In response to the survey question about what other one competency, skill, or trait is necessary for the position, one dean replied, “Finding balance between what my job demands of me in effort and time and my
personal life. That has become critical as the only way to manage the stress associated with these positions.” Another dean answered that question by stating, “I think you need to know how to take care of yourself. The answer isn’t always to work harder. Often it is gaining perspective. Avocations are important.” Still another dean responded to the survey question about offering advice for prospective deans in this way: “Have a clear understanding of the job you chose to go into. Have the patience to know that you will not win all the battles and learn to pick where to make your stands. Find an effective way to achieve balance between work and your private life.” Strategies for achieving this work/life balance vary, and some deans suggested that they don’t achieve a balance very well. Nevertheless, many of the deans saw it as an important aspect of being in the position.

**Challenge: being in the middle.** Arguably the most significant challenge as a context for the competency model for the dean position is that of being in the middle, of the dean being positioned between higher-level administrators and faculty. This challenge was established in the literature by Wolverton et al. (1999) and Gmelch et al. (1999), and the deans in this study, too, suggested this phenomenon as a central challenge in their position. Seven out of the ten deans mentioned this aspect of the job in their initial interviews. One dean said that part of the problem as she perceives it is that she is told by higher-level administrators to implement various initiatives, yet they sometimes don’t know the reality of the classroom: “Those people don’t have a clue where those basic skills students are. Not a clue. They have not set foot in one of those classrooms. They do not know what a student is like who does not know how to read and write.”
Other deans mentioned that this “in the middle” aspect of the job is difficult because they would like to be able to support their faculty but may not be able to. One said, “I do think that the challenge is forever the fact that we have to answer to a higher level administration and we may not always be able to make a decision that all of the faculty or most of the faculty like.” This same dean discussed what he saw as the most challenging aspect of the job: “The areas that I saw are most challenging go back to upholding rules and procedures, in particular rules and procedures that I may not particularly support, but I don’t have a choice.” Still another dean saw this aspect of the position as being central to the importance of good communication: “We sit between the top administrators and the troops. And if we don’t know how to communicate with both sides, it would be impossible to do our jobs.” The deans who mentioned this did not discuss strategies to address this challenge other than good communication. Instead, they talked about it more as a reality of the job, something to acknowledge as important but not necessarily something one could do anything about.

**Challenge: re-envisioning of role and relationships.** In their individual interviews, many of the deans mentioned that an additional challenging aspect of moving into the dean’s position was that faculty had to re-envision them in a new role and they had to re-envision themselves in that new role as well. This challenge was presented in the literature as well, Griffith (2006, p. 68), McCarthy (2003, p. 43), and Gallos (2002, para. 16) emphasizing the challenge of being re-envisioned and re-envisioning oneself. To some extent the challenge was for faculty to see them in a new role. One dean mentioned, “The perception has been that as a faculty I was a colleague, and so it is
difficult when you step out of the role that you’ve been in for 14+ years and then suddenly step into a new role.” Another dean explained further, “I was in the group, and all of a sudden I’m telling them what to do or maybe what they can have, what they can’t have, and that was hard for them. And that’s definitely a disadvantage.” Still another dean mentioned that when she took the position there were suddenly assumptions about her that she hadn’t anticipated, assumptions about the relationships she would have with faculty. Other deans mentioned that it was most difficult for them to re-imagine themselves in a new role, in particular that leaving the faculty part of themselves behind was difficult. One dean explained,

I suffered a little bit of what I would call guilt. When I first became dean, I felt like all my background, all my academic preparation I was never going to use. For me professionally it was something that bothered me. I felt like I had betrayed who I was, not because I’m no longer faculty but because I’m no longer able to use what I studied, what I spent a good ten years of my life learning.

This challenge is not only in what the deans do but in how the deans conceive of themselves. As they take on their new position, they are obviously taking on new responsibilities, going to new meetings, filling their days outside the classroom. At the same time, their former faculty colleagues begin to see them differently while, inside themselves, they may wrestle with their new identity, having left behind a significant part of who they were—faculty members.

The Model of Competencies

The challenges mentioned on the previous pages provide a backdrop for the model of competencies that has emerged in this study. Each of these competencies has
been discussed in previous parts of this chapter, but this model shows relationships between those competencies. This model is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6. The Model of Competencies

Figure 6 illustrates that community college deans who supervise faculty with whom they were previously peers rely on three essential competencies. These three competencies—communication, collaboration, and professionalism—are central to the other competencies in the model, all of which surround the central three. Of those three essential competencies, the one displayed on top, communication, emerged in all stages of data collection as being the one competency that is most complex, most multi-faceted, and most impactful on the other competencies. For example, collaboration, though a central competency of its own, relies on excellent communication skills. (Members of
the focus group interview discussed this point.) The same can be said for professionalism. These particular competencies were brought out in all three stages of data collection—individual interviews, the focus group interview, and the questionnaires.

When looking at the outer ring of competencies, one can choose any particular competency and observe an influence of at least one of the three central competencies and often all three of them. Building relationships, for instance, is a competency that requires various communication skills, and in the community college setting, often goes hand-in-hand with collaboration on some kind of project. Professionalism is apparent in building relationships, too, both as an aid in forming the relationships and an outcome of having done so well. One can take the outer ring of competencies and rotate it so the competencies within it align differently with the three central competencies; in doing so one will see relationships between competencies that ring true based on the data collection for this study. For instance, rotating the ring so fairness sits directly under professionalism or so building relationships sits directly under collaboration creates juxtapositions of competencies that were evident in data collection and that were noted when deans discussed the overlap of competencies.

The outer ring of competencies includes those that are abilities and could be tied to professional experience (resource management, organizational strategy, vision/strategic thinking, building relationships) as well as those that are behavioral traits (fairness and humility) that may have come from any number of background influences. The outer-ring competencies also include two that are knowledge-based: understanding processes/culture, a competency that a dean gets from having worked at the college in a
variety of capacities; and knowledge of instruction, a competency gained from a variety of experiences including being a student, being an instructor, and/or researching and studying pedagogical practices.

The AACC competencies are present in the model. In fact, the three central competencies are all AACC competencies. Also, two of the outer-ring competencies (resource management and organizational strategy) are from the AACC document. The only AACC competency not present in the model is community college advocacy, which, as explained earlier, was viewed by the deans as more important for community college leaders at the executive level, those administrators who would be interfacing with a broader range of constituents. This model of competencies illustrates the importance of the AACC document as an influential resource for community college leadership and as part of the framework for this study. This model does not simply replicate the AACC document because that document was written with a broader range of leaders in mind—especially vice presidents, presidents, and chancellors—while this model focuses on a very particular subset of administrators, academic deans supervising their former colleagues.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

The intent of this study was to address the problem of community college academic deans having moved into their positions directly from the faculty ranks and being unprepared for what the dean position holds and what competencies will best enable them to succeed in the position. Because the dean position—placed between faculty and students and their immediate concerns and upper administration with their higher-level viewpoint—is critical for smooth operation of the college, adequate preparation for entering the job is desirable if not necessary. That necessity led to the purpose of this study: to determine a model of competencies for the deans in this position, particularly for those deans who have moved into their new role from the ranks of faculty and who now supervise those faculty with whom they were once peers. That purpose was further developed with the following research questions:

**Central research question:** What are the advantages as well as the challenges faced by community college deans when supervising, managing, and leading colleagues from the same division in which they taught, and what competencies increase their chances to succeed in this circumstance?

**Subquestions:**
- How is the dean’s job impacted by close familiarity with the faculty?
- How do the deans’ competencies in this situation fit in the context of the AACC’s Competencies for Community College Leaders?
- What other competencies do successful deans in this situation exhibit?
- How would a faculty member, aspiring to lead, best prepare for such a role?
That last subquestion led to the development of a second outcome of the study, a list of strategies, related to those competencies, for faculty considering a move into this entry-level management position. Considering those two major outcomes of the study—the model of competencies and the strategies for faculty—this study’s goal was to prove useful for community college personnel at multiple levels: to deans, who could use the competencies in considering their own performance; to faculty, who may be interesting in pursuing a career as a dean; and to higher-level administrators, who could use the information in considering professional development opportunities for deans.

The study itself was conducted with a qualitative grounded theory methodology incorporating data from individual interviews with ten academic deans in one California community college district, a focus group interview with a subset of five of those deans, a follow-up questionnaire with the ten deans, and with a questionnaire for faculty supervised by those deans. The analysis and results section of this study (Chapter 4) was organized around the research questions (above) to closely tie the results to the intended purpose of the research project.

The results revealed a model of competencies (summarized in Figure 6) that includes three central competencies—professionalism, collaboration, and communication—the latter of which was revealed to be the most complex in its relation to the other competencies. The model also revealed eight other competencies: resource management, knowledge of instruction, building relationships, organizational strategy, understanding processes and culture, vision and strategic thinking, humility, and fairness.
These eight competencies were all related to at least one and most often all of the central three competencies.

The other outcome for this study, the strategies for faculty who might consider a move into the dean’s position, revealed five strategies: preparing psychologically, getting experience, knowing what you’re getting into, having a plan, and polishing specific skills. Additionally, the results of the study revealed a context for the deans’ competencies, a context of the challenges deans experience in their jobs. These include assisting faculty in change, working within the context of the previous dean, having time to get the work done, developing a healthy work/life balance, being in the middle (between faculty and higher-level administrators, and re-envisioning their role as an administrator and not a professor. These challenges functioned as part of the conceptual framework for this study.

**Results within Context of Conceptual Framework and Existing Literature**

The conceptual framework for this study had the results or outcomes of the study placed in the context of and influenced by three factors: (a) the traits or competencies of successful deans and department chairs as revealed in the literature, (b) the AACC Competencies for Community College Administrators, and (c) the stresses and challenges for deans transitioning to their positions and/or working in their positions. Each of these influences proved to be important in developing and understanding the competencies.

Competencies revealed in the existing literature were corroborated in this study’s three stages of data gathering. For example, Eddy’s (2012) model of four “holistic competencies” including inclusivity, framing meaning, attention to the bottom line, and
systems thinking (pp. 33-36) were reflected in this study’s competencies of collaboration, communication (especially communicating context), resource management, and organizational strategy. Also, what Eddy considers to be an overarching competency, what she calls “contextual competency” (p. 37), defined as “understanding the college culture and reading the context of what is valued,” was echoed in this study’s competency of understanding processes and culture. Likewise, the competencies presented by McNair and Phelan (2012) in their study of community college presidents—“visioning or scenario planning skills” and “demonstrating an obligation for student success” (p. 92)—can be seen in this study’s competencies of vision/strategic thinking knowledge of instruction. However, while the competencies presented in the existing literature were similar to many of the competencies in this study, they were emphasized differently—probably because the existing literature does not focus on the exact managerial population as this study. While Eddy (2012) listed “contextual competency” as an overarching competency, this study includes “understanding processes and culture” in the outer ring of competencies, related to the central three but not included with them.

The AACC Competencies for Community College Administrators (2005) were reflected in this study for two obvious reasons: (a) because of their prominent role in the literature, they were used as a significant part of the conceptual framework for this study and (b) dean participants were asked to respond to the AACC competencies by ranking them in importance for their position and to explain their rankings. What became evident in analyzing the data is that the AACC competencies, as valuable as they are overall for community college leaders, take on a different emphasis for the academic dean position.
and particularly for those deans supervising their former peers. While the deans in this study considered all the AACC competencies (with the notable exception of community college advocacy) important, they viewed them from a different perspective, a more local, less institutional perspective. For example, the main description of organizational strategy in the AACC document reads,

An effective community college leader strategically improves the quality of the institution, protects the long-term health of the organization, promotes the success of all students, and sustains the community college mission, based on knowledge of the organization, its environment, and future trends. (AACC, 2005, p. 4)

This language, with its emphasis on “the institution” and “the organization,” suggests a much broader perspective than what exists at the dean level. This was borne out in the data from the deans, their emphasis on the organizational strategy of their divisions or units rather than on the institution overall. The AACC document does not provide the title or rank of its participants, although it does mention that those involved were “participants in the [Leading Forward] leadership summits and…members of the Leading Forward National Advisory Panel” (2005, p. 2). That group of community college leaders may not have included many administrators at the dean level, which would account for the higher-level perspective of the document.

Additionally, the AACC document does not present its competencies in any kind of hierarchy or with any kind of emphasis indicating that one competency is more central than another. Also, although the language from competency to competency shows overlap among the six, the document does not include significant analysis of the relationships between the six competencies. In contrast, the model of competencies that emerged in this study reveals three central competencies—communication, collaboration,
and professionalism—with communication taking on the most prominent and complex role in how it relates to the others. In this study, communication has also been categorized and analyzed in several subcategories—for instance, transparency, communicating context, and communicating difficult information—with attentive listening emerging as dominant subcategory. Because of this level of detail, the competencies in this study should prove useful given that they are applicable for the particular subset of administrators for which the study was designed.

**Analysis of Results**

The model of competencies that emerged in this study—with its three central competencies and eight related competencies—reveals the community college academic dean position as complex, perhaps more complex than is immediately apparent from an outside perspective. The position involves specific skills and traits related to resources and the college (resource management, understanding processes and culture), but it also involves people skills that could almost be viewed as personality characteristics (humility, fairness). The model suggests that deans must be able manage a budget and develop a class schedule (examples of the more obvious parts of the job) while also providing leadership in a complicated environment of multiple constituencies, each of which views the dean role somewhat differently. For example, the faculty questionnaire in this study revealed participants felt that a dean’s role was to support them and to serve as their advocate. However, the perspective from higher levels of administration is often different, the expectation being that the dean will serve the needs of the college, whether or not that agrees with the views of the faculty. This gets right to the point of Gmelch et
al. (1999), who discuss the dean’s challenge of attempting to serve both constituencies simultaneously (p. 718). The current study’s model of competencies is an illustration of the skills and traits necessary for such a complex management situation.

In addition, this study’s results—both the competency model and the strategies for faculty considering a move to the deanship—suggest that there is a lack of awareness of the exact nature of the dean’s job. Although others surrounding the dean could probably point to his or her primary responsibilities, the intricacies of the job are perhaps not apparent. Each of the four strategies for faculty considering the dean position (illustrated in Figure 5) is related either to not being aware of the reality of the position or to needing to be prepared for what the position holds. A lack of awareness might also be found in some higher-level administrators who simply want the dean to carry out a directive without being fully aware of the complex combination of competencies from this study’s model that the dean must have in order to do so successfully.

The causes of this complex, in-between situation are understandable. In terms of the organizational structure of the college, the dean is the closest administrator to the faculty. If the dean had also been a member of the faculty—teaching alongside them, perhaps taking a leadership role as a department chair or academic senator—one can understand why the faculty would view this person as an advocate for them, as someone expected to take their position on any given issue. At the same time, the faculty may be largely unaware that when a dean is hired, the expectation from higher levels of administration (and from the district in the case of the multi-college district in this study) is that the dean will represent the views of the broader institution. This situation provides
a rationale for the kinds of competencies in this study’s model. The three central competencies (communication, collaboration, and professionalism) all are necessary to navigate this complex social scenario. The competencies in the outer ring relate to this scenario as well but are generally targeted to more specific aspects of the dean’s role.

The results of this study offer several implications. The competency model, along with the context of challenges deans face, presents a picture of the dean position that can be of value to the deans themselves. The model could be the basis of any number of professional development activities or programs for existing deans. If professional development activities for deans already exist at a college, this study’s model could suggest possibilities for adding to or modifying such programs. For instance, the model could be the basis for a local or regional academy to train new deans or an orientation for those who have just taken the position. To that end, it is possible that both an institutional vision of the dean position and the manner by which a college fosters development of its deans can become more fully representative of the complex nature of the position. Furthermore, the model could be of value to a college in recruiting and hiring a new dean. Both job descriptions and interview questions could be influenced by the model of competencies to insure that the college is using hiring criteria that are most pertinent to the position. The model could also be used by those administrators supervising deans in this position and in developing evaluation criteria for deans.

Also, although not designed for this purpose, this study and its results could prove informative for other kinds of organizations, either private or public, in which employees have an opportunity to move from one position into a higher-level position and supervise
former peers. For example, this is common in public service agencies such as law
enforcement, an officer advancing to a sergeant or lieutenant position and then
supervising officers with whom he or she worked as a peer. However, higher education
in general and community colleges, specifically, offer a social dynamic that likely would
not be the same in other work places, a dynamic in which the ground level workers, the
faculty, have a history of empowerment via shared governance and academic freedom.
This study’s model of competencies and strategies to prepare for advancing from faculty
to dean may be applicable for other organizations, but the context in which they are used
would likely be different.

This model of competencies also provides a new takeoff point for researchers
interested in better understanding the community college academic dean position. Each
individual competency could be the focus of a scholarly article on that trait or skill.
Likewise, the strategies for faculty considering a move to a dean position provide
individual topics for further study. See below for other recommendations for further
study.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has approached its research questions utilizing three stages of data
gathering and analysis of qualitative data from academic deans in one California
community college district including three separate colleges. Nevertheless, a limitation
of the study is that the population includes just the one community college district. The
breadth of institutions called community colleges in the United States is quite diverse—
from large institutions offering a multitude of undergraduate academic disciplines to
small technical colleges focusing their offerings on particular vocational programs. Some are part of their state’s university system, some exist as institutions of their own, and others are tied to a web of community colleges within their state. The focus of this study on one community college district in one state is a limitation to acknowledge. One could assert that, even in the California community college system, a single-college district would present a somewhat different scenario than the multi-college district in this study.

The diversity of the colleges and the deans in this study (albeit from one community college district) may temper that limitation. One college is large and suburban, one large and urban, and another small to medium size and suburban. The ten deans span a variety of work areas or divisions. Some supervise in math and science related divisions, some in humanities, some in liberal arts, and one in health and athletics. Some of these divisions are relatively small in the number of faculty and staff supervised; others are quite large.

In addition, the interview and questionnaire data that have a numerical component are not sufficient to draw quantitative conclusions. The sample sizes of deans and of faculty in these questionnaires do not offer empirical statistical findings. However, combined with the narrative comments in the questionnaires (which comprise the main data goal of that research tool for this study), they suggest tendencies in the way deans and faculty think about the questions they were asked.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Based on the above limitations, a useful follow-up to this research would be a quantitative study of competencies for community college deans based on a national
survey of deans in AACC listed colleges and, if possible, to isolate those deans who have supervised faculty with whom they were formerly peers. Such a study could further test the model of competencies that has emerged in the present study. Another possible study could be an analysis of the different ways executive-level administrators (vice presidents, presidents, and chancellors) interpret the AACC Competencies compared to administrators at the dean level. The present study revealed that deans interpreted nearly every AACC competency in a more limited, local manner than the language in the competency would suggest for executive-level administrators. This difference in interpretation could be the topic of its own study. This difference in interpretation of competencies also suggests a potential study about community college academic deans and how they can best work with their immediate supervisors, which is related to the concept in this study about the dean being in the middle. That position of being in the middle, explained in this study with its particular application to the relationship with faculty, suggests an important connection with the dean’s supervisor as well. Still another study could explore strategies for how deans can promote to higher levels of administration. Also, another possible topic could isolate student services administrators or administrative services administrators to determine how the AACC competencies apply to those subpopulations of administrators.

For further research about a deans’ relationship with faculty, another research project would be to study the impact of shared governance and/or academic freedom on the jobs of community college deans. Many of the deans in the current study mentioned these aspects of faculty rights and participation as influential in how and why
collaboration is important. A study focusing on academic freedom and/or shared governance could test those forces as a major influence on how deans do their jobs.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The position of academic dean in a community college is unique in its importance. While all administrative positions (and likewise faculty and staff positions) reflect critical roles, the academic dean—the immediate supervisor of faculty imparting the college’s fundamental activity of teaching—is in a position of both great influence and responsibility. For that reason, it is important for our community colleges to understand the dean position as well as possible, and, further, to know what competencies enable a dean to do the job to full capability. This study offers a competency model to assist in that regard. While further research can expand upon and test various aspects of this model (and of the strategies for faculty), the results of this study offer our colleges a broader perspective of the dean position, a perspective that has the possibility of strengthening that position for the greater health of the institution.
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Appendix A: Interview Guide
Appendix A: Interview Guide
(for interviews with deans)

1. Prior to meeting today, I sent you a summary of the AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders and asked you to rate each in order of importance for your job as a dean. Could you tell me how you rated each and perhaps a few reasons why?

2. How would you assess your level of competence in these areas when you first became a dean? What were your strengths? Your weaknesses?

3. What competencies have you improved in? Can you describe areas in which you think you need to improve even more?

4. Please describe for me the advantages and disadvantages of supervising the faculty with whom you were once a peer.

5. What competencies or strategies do you employ that are of particular help in supervising those former peers?

6. What skills, traits, or competencies do you wish you had had when you first stepped into your job as a dean?

7. Can you describe for me your relationship with the faculty in your area? How has your relationship with the faculty evolved from the time you were teaching and working with them to now?

8. Do you believe there is a connection between being a good teacher and being an effective dean? If so, please explain. If not, please explain.

9. In what way are you able to be the very best dean you can possibly be? Can you give me an example or two of that? Also, what areas are most challenging?

10. Please explain how you attempt to balance the concerns of the faculty with the concerns of the college and/or district—especially when those seem not to be in alignment.
11. If you were leaving your dean position and a faculty member expressed interest in applying for the job, what advice would you give this person? Are there any particular ways a faculty member could prepare to transition into the dean’s position?
Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Guide
Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Guide

1. If you’ll recall, I asked each of you in your individual interview to rank in importance for your position the six AACC Competencies for Community College Leaders. I thought I would ask about those competencies in a slightly different way. If you were just becoming a new dean and had to choose one of those competencies, one of those things that you could do really well, what would it be and why?

2. During the individual interviews, I also asked you about the advantages and disadvantages of supervising faculty who were once your colleagues or peers. The advantages you and the other deans mentioned fall into a few main categories:
   a. You know the faculty and are familiar with the area.
   b. You have already established a reputation with the faculty.
   c. You have an existing positive relationship with the faculty.

   The disadvantages also fall into a few main categories:
   a. You know the faculty but your role is different.
   b. The faculty have unreasonable or uncomfortable expectations of you.
   c. It is difficult to be (or to appear to be) fair.

   Can you explain for me which of these advantages and disadvantages (or others) are most significant in your experience—and why?

3. Another question I asked you during individual interviews was what advice you’d have for a faculty member considering a move into a dean position. Your many responses could be categorized into four categories:
   a. Be Psychologically Prepared
   b. Be Involved, Get Broader Perspective
   c. Be Aware of the Reality of the Job
   d. Hone Skills before Taking Position

   How important is it to be psychologically prepared or aware of the reality of the job versus being prepared in discrete skills or tasks?

4. Are there any other competencies or skills that we haven’t mentioned that you think are important in supervising, managing, or leading the faculty who were once your peers?

5. Can you explain how you view the position of dean differently now that you’re in the position compared to when you were a faculty member in the division?
Appendix C: Questionnaire for Deans
Appendix C: Questionnaire for Deans

1. In individual interviews for this study, deans rated communication as one of the most important competencies for their position. The items listed below were aspects of communication that deans mentioned. Please select three of these aspects that you feel are most important. Then offer a brief explanation for the one aspect that you feel is most critical.

_____Being transparent in communication with faculty
_____Assuring that communication is clear and understandable
_____Communicating context for issues and decisions
_____Communicating difficult information
_____Communicating one-on-one with faculty and staff
_____Communicating to motivate faculty and staff
_____Knowing whom to include in communications
_____Attentive listening
_____Speaking to groups skillfully

Explanation
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Collaboration is another competency that deans identified as being particularly important for their position. Please briefly explain why you believe it is important (or why you do not) and in what context it is most important.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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3. A third competency deans mentioned as important was professionalism. Please briefly define what that term means for you in the context of your job as dean.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
4. What other one competency, skill, or trait would you mention as being critical in your job as a dean?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. One of the research questions for this study is this: How would a faculty member, aspiring to lead, best prepare for the role of an academic dean? Please offer two or three bullet points of advice you would offer such a person.

________________________________________________________________________

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6. In individual interviews, respondents frequently commented that in many ways faculty members do not have a clear perception of what the dean position entails. The following is a list of possible areas that faculty may not understand about the position. Please select as many as you believe are applicable.

_____What the dean does on day-to-day basis

_____Whom the dean represents

_____The degree of influence or power the dean has

_____How the dean interacts with both faculty colleagues and administrative colleagues

_____How the dean interacts with students

_____Other. Please explain.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Your anonymous opinion will contribute to a study on community college deans who supervise faculty with whom they taught as colleagues before becoming deans.

Do not put your name or your colleagues’ names on this survey.
Appendix D: Faculty Questionnaire
Appendix D: Faculty Questionnaire

Disclaimer: COMPLETION OF THIS SURVEY IMPLIES CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

The following is a summary the American Association of Community College Administrators Competencies for Community College Leaders:

Organizational strategy—strategically improves quality, protects long-term health, promotes success of students, and sustains the community college mission.

Resource Management—equitably and ethically sustains people, processes, information, and physical and financial assets.

Communication—uses clear listening, speaking, and writing skills to engage in honest, open dialogue at all levels of the college and community.

Collaboration—develops and maintains responsive, cooperative, ethical, and mutually beneficial internal and external relationships.

Community college advocacy—understands, commits to, and advocates for the mission of the community college.

Professionalism—works ethically to set high standards for self and others. (Wallin, 2012, pp. 22-23)

1. Please rate the above competencies in order of importance for how important they are to be a successful dean in your division or area:

1 = most important, 6 = least important

_____ Organizational Strategy

_____ Resource Management

_____ Communication

_____ Collaboration

_____ Community College Advocacy

_____ Professionalism
2. Please add any competencies, skills, or traits not included above that you believe are important for the dean of an academic division to have.

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3. Are you considering, at some point in your career, a move to an administrative position?

_____ Yes    _____ No

Briefly explain why.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. Do you believe there is a connection between being a good teacher and being an effective dean?

_____ Yes    _____ No

Please briefly explain.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. What do you think motivates faculty to apply for a dean’s position? *(Mark as many as you like.)*

_____ Desire to make a difference
_____ Tired of teaching, desire for a change

_____ Desire to be involved at higher levels

_____ Desire to manage or lead

_____ Other

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. For those faculty who choose not to pursue a dean’s position, what factors inhibit them from making that choice? (Mark as many as you like.)

_____ Do not want to leave teaching

_____ Too much work and long hours at dean level

_____ Too much responsibility at dean level

_____ Can’t imagine self as administrator

_____ Other

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Your anonymous opinion will contribute to a study on community college deans who supervise faculty with whom they taught as colleagues before becoming deans.

Do not put your name or your colleagues’ names on this survey.