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Strategic Leadership: A Model for Promoting, Sustaining, and Advancing Institutional Significance

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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP: A MODEL FOR PROMOTING, SUSTAINING, AND ADVANCING INSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

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This article presents the methods, materials, and manpower required to create a strategic leadership program for promoting, sustaining, and advancing institutional significance. The functionality of the program is based on the Original Case Study Design (OCS) methodology, in which participants are given actual college issues to investigate from a leadership perspective. Participants in the program work in teams to maximize the development of their individual and group leadership skills. Program outcomes are demonstrated by formal presentations that identify an organizational problem and the design of a solution. The identification of problems and strategies for solutions occurs within the framework of strategic leadership development. It is argued in this paper that layered strategic leadership is the key element to promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance. Implications and recommendations for community college strategic leadership practice are also addressed in this applied research article.

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Although there is significant controversy over the issue of a reduction of leadership skills resulting from the retirement of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), a vast array of leadership skills and experiences may be lost in the next several years (Brandel, 2008; Brewer, 2007; Buhler, 2008; Helton & Soubik, 2004; Ragalevsky, 2008; Ringo & MacDonald, 2008; Wellins & Byham, 2001). The shortage of leadership is not simply a matter of boomers leaving the workforce; rather, the concern is related to the depth of the experiences and skills of these individuals. Baby boomers have been in the workforce approaching 30 or more years, and it is the loss of these extensive experiences that concerns organizational leaders (Flynn, 2007; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Wallin, 2006).

Educational (and other) institutions have begun to develop in-house programs to create leaders from within and throughout the organization using field of practice as a method of succession planning (Berke, 2005; Blair, 2005; Campbell, 2002; Ebbers, Gallsath, Rockel, & Coyan, 2000; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Geroy, Caleb, & Wright, 2005; Lucie, 2006). This emerging trend depends upon institutional foresight to create an infrastructure in which resources and practices are used to develop proactive leaders at all levels within the organization. Prigge (2005) believes community colleges will experience an exodus of leaders during the next decade. Therefore, the impetus exists for community colleges to develop their own leaders—training employees with potential who are accustomed to the realities of the workplace. According to Coonan (2005), developing leaders from within an organization facilitates long-term organizational sustainability by gaining leaders already familiar with the culture of the organization while shortening the learning curve about the organization.

An example of this leadership methodology, titled Leadership Trenholm, is a local institutional program developed by H. Council Trenholm State Technical College in Montgomery, Alabama. Leadership Trenholm intends to positively impact the institution by developing quality, innovative, action-oriented, and engaged leaders from the ranks of the college. The development of strategic leadership from within the college will provide future leaders who possess insight into the culture, operations, and mission of the college; moreover, this type of leadership promotes and sustains the validity of institutional effectiveness (Skolits & Graybeal, 2007), or what VanWagoner, Bowman and Spraggs (2005) termed “the significant community college” (p. 38).

THE MODEL OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Once succession planning has begun, the process to develop strategic leaders as champions of institutional significance gives rise to organizational considerations that must be factored into the succession equation. Figure 1 provides a model from which organizational considerations may be viewed.

To develop strategic leaders within the community college, resources must be set aside for the process. To achieve institutional significance, resources must not only be set aside, but the resources must be effectively used. When two-year college administrators consider developing their own leaders, additional factors must be considered as direct and indirect positive outcomes of this effort. In Figure 1, the 10 outcomes are the direct results of a community college becoming an institution of significance, codependent with, and heavily reliant upon, successful strategies of strategic leadership.

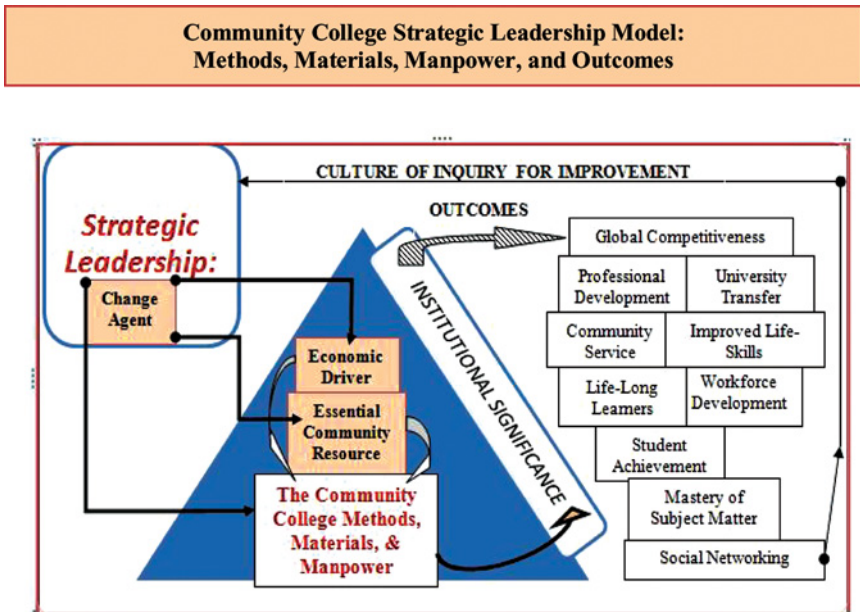


Figure 1. Strategic leadership to achieve institutional significance model.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP RESOURCES TO PROMOTE AND SUSTAIN INSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

To reach institutional significance, resources must be identified and made available to those in the strategic leadership pipeline. The pipeline includes individuals participating in leadership training and individuals conducting the leadership training. There are three major resource categories that are important in this process: methods, materials, and manpower. To maximize the overarching success of strategic leadership development, thereby undergirding, promoting, and sustaining the corequisite of institutional significance, the institution should understand, support, and provide for the methods, materials, and manpower resources that must be allocated for strategic leadership to develop and perpetuate itself in the context and culture of the institution—past, present, and future.

METHODS OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TO PROMOTE AND SUSTAIN INSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Methods are the policies and practices associated with the community college. Practices may be considered as those actions taken by faculty, staff, students, community, administrators, legislators—and all other stakeholders—that affect the college. When the development of strategic leadership is underway, the infrastructure and threads of institutional practice command center stage. Thus, methods are the practices within and throughout the community college to promote the success of developing strategic leaders, subsequently promoting, sustaining, and advancing institutional significance. Unfortunately, institutional practice may also result in negative outcomes. For example, prospective leaders may be discouraged by institutional practices that do not support their ideas. Consequently, positive strategic leadership is dependent on methods or practices that promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance, not on negative organizational practices that tip the balance of leadership in a negative direction.

One specifically required institutional practice is the need to develop local institutional leadership. To alter one's mindset from status quo to innovative approaches to creating strategic leaders, community college administrators will need to think outside the proverbial leadership box. This concept was noted by VanWagoner et al. (2005):

The move from success to significance will not be easy. Community college leaders will have to think differently, act differently, and respond differently to their environments. Nevertheless, the parts

are there. Community colleges have long attracted leaders within their organizations who want to make a difference, who rise above the traditional culture, and who share a vision for the future. There has never been a better time or a greater need for community colleges to assume their significant role in creating the future . . . Community colleges are the right institutions at the right time, if we make the critical move to significance. (p. 50)

A critical move to significance includes a conscientious effort on the part of community college leaders to understand the framework of institutional practice as a methodology to improve institutional significance. Consequently, institutional practice and strategic leadership development are direct correlates of one another; unfortunately, they are not always positive correlates. Although methods or practices are crucial to the development of strategic leadership to promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance, coequal to success is the type and quality of the materials used.

MATERIALS OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TO PROMOTE AND SUSTAIN INSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Materials for strategic leadership to promote and sustain institutional significance are more tangible than methods or practices. Unfortunately, practices are more prone to interfere with successful leadership development, and therefore, may require a more diligent approach to their influence (Barron & Henderson, 1995; Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006; Fulton-Calkins & Milling, 2005). Materials are the items that are more easily recognized. Examples might include landmark references such as Senge's (1990) *The fifth discipline: The art & practice of the learning organization*, or Collins' (2001) *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap and others don't*. Additionally, other types of materials are found in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *Thrust for Educational Leadership*, or *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*. Also, there are many organizations which offer various types of leadership materials, such as Corexcel (Linking Learning to Performance: <http://www.corexcel.com>) or Velsoft (We're All About the Training: <http://www.velsoft.com>). Although all of these types of materials are excellent resources, they only constitute one side of the materials equation.

The other side of the materials equation is culture-based. For example, Leadership Trenholm has developed its own in-house

Leadership Trenholm resource and user guide © (2011). This document is a published instrument for strategic leadership development to promote and sustain institutional significance. The document was written by a committee whose members have considerable educational experience in the community college, but more specifically, in the local college. These local experiences create the framework for success when developing local leadership. This is not to say that the leadership training is not transferrable; on the contrary, the leadership skills developed in Leadership Trenholm are explicitly applicable to any college or university; the difference, however, is in the applicability to the local organizational and community structure. Thus, the *Leadership Trenholm resource and user guide* supports both strategic leadership development throughout the organization and institutional significance at all levels of operation.

The argument in this paper suggests that to maximize the outcome of local strategic leadership development, the materials included in the process should be those that are known as *leadership proven* and those that are known as *local proven*, (e.g., *Leadership Trenholm resource and user guide*.) The combination of these two genres of materials will maximize the types and quality of materials used by individuals who are motivated to achieve strategic leadership status so that these same individuals might promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance.

Regardless of the materials used, the key component in this process is the effective application of the materials. To effectively develop strategic leaders, there is a truth that should be considered: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." For the community college to develop strategic leadership through its local system is to propose the notion that building leaders today insures that future leaders may be developed for tomorrow. In other words, perpetuate the strategic leader species through the use of invigorating materials which challenge, inform, and guide the journey to success. Materials that motivate and inform are more likely to aid the development of strategic leadership, thereby promoting, sustaining, and advancing institutional and cultural significance (Berke, 2005; Claxton, 2007; Reille & Kezar, 2010; VanWagoner et al., 2005).

MANPOWER OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TO PROMOTE AND SUSTAIN INSTITUTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Manpower, or the human element involved in the development of strategic leaders who will promote and sustain institutional

significance, is a dynamic variable. There are two types of manpower: (a) prospective leaders and, (b) facilitator-leaders. In the context of Leadership Trenholm, the prospective leaders are the individuals participating in the Leadership Trenholm training program. Conversely, the facilitator-leaders consist of the Leadership Program Steering Committee who guide the training process and provide instruction and mentoring, and who function as liaison between the prospective leader, community personnel, and other human assets.

The committee that heads up the manpower process is a diverse group of individuals with various backgrounds, education, and work experiences. One of the core issues for success of Leadership Trenholm is the support of the college administration for the Leadership Program Steering Committee. Community colleges are in the business of developing human capital. Human capital is the primary human resource necessary for all sectors of the workforce, including strategic leadership skills. To develop strategic leadership in the local college, the administration must provide the approval and resources necessary for committee initiatives to take institutional form. Subsequent to administrative approval, the development of strategic leadership to promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance becomes policy. At this point, the institution now has a mandate to move toward the goal of institutional significance beyond any consideration of status quo.

Individuals may request to participate in Leadership Trenholm by one of two methods: (a) they may be nominated, or (b) they may nominate themselves. Any qualified employee is eligible to participate in the program. However, because the college has been granted authority to train and build a new generation of strategic leaders, manpower issues surface. What are these issues? Not everyone in the organization will embrace the opportunity to become a strategic leader within the college. There are several potential reasons for the lack of engagement by prospective participants such as they (a) are happy in their current jobs, (b) are not motivated to take the challenge, (c) question the added value for participating in this leadership program, or (d) they are overwhelmed by the pressures of other job responsibilities. These brief examples suggest to the Leadership Program Steering Committee possible responses. First, participants in the program must understand and perceive the tangible benefits to themselves in their present positions. If the person is a faculty member, for instance, participation in a leadership program must relate well with instructional duties. For example, if a faculty member decides to follow the path to strategic leadership, how does this relate to teaching, learning, assessments, and student outcomes? Simply stated, research

and application suggest that faculty members make excellent strategic leaders, and their individual and collective practices result in actions which promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance (see Figure 1) (Flynn, 2007; Wallin, 2006). This is because institutional significance includes elements of teaching, learning, assessments, and student outcomes.

Second, participants must perceive that their efforts to become strategic leaders in the college are going to be acknowledged. Furthermore, they must be given every opportunity to practice their new skill set. Assume that a graduate of Leadership Trenholm completes the program, is now highly motivated, and seeks a place to practice this newly acquired set of leadership skills. Also, further assume that this individual is motivated to promote and sustain institutional significance by serving on the Recruitment and Retention Committee. The first time the individual attends a Recruitment and Retention Committee meeting, the gathering is conducted with lackluster effort, and this particular person's comments are perceived as unappreciated. A chink in the strategic leadership armor has now formed. From this point on, the individual—now highly motivated to do many good things for the college—may recall the meeting as a disconnect between words and actions.

The third and final example that a Leadership Program Steering Committee may consider in promoting the development of strategic leadership in the local college is applications research. Each person who successfully completes Leadership Trenholm may not have a life-long goal to become president of the college. In this case, one innovative practice that has huge potential to promote and sustain institutional significance is to allow successful graduates of the leadership program to collaborate in applications research. Applications research is both simple and complex, but the benefits to the community college have enormous potential. Imagine that two staff members go through the leadership program. Also imagine that these two individuals begin to see data streams that are critical in nature, but they have either not been noticed before or have not been collected and processed. As strategic leaders promoting institutional significance, this data collection has potential heretofore untapped. In other words, because of the continuous culture of inquiry and open support, these types of practices can become significant contributors to institutional significance.

Consequently, to promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance, the community college is informed that strategic leadership is the responsibility of each stakeholder in the process. Faculty, staff, administration, students, and community leaders are all part of the

equation. Initially, Leadership Trenholm begins with college employees and expands the program from that perspective.

THE ORIGINAL CASE STUDY DESIGN: METHODOLOGY TO DEVELOP STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

In contrast to the de facto case study (Yin, 2003), the Original Case Study Design (OCS D) involves the definitive application of collaborative methods. For example, effective leadership does not exist in a vacuum where only the leader makes decisions; rather, strategic leadership involves others in decisions and outcomes. Therefore, the OCS D is a practice in which working in leadership teams is required. The OCS D promotes this practice as the most effective method to train leaders to function in dynamic environments. Dynamic environments require leaders to be self-assured team leaders and team players, yet highly efficient and effective managers of methods, materials, and manpower considerations.

Actual leadership development requires areas of concentration that guide and nurture the development of strategic leaders. The areas of concentration identified in this article include (a) intellectual capital, (b) the global commodity, and (c) social networking.

Intellectual capital is the domain of leadership in which the future leader begins to understand the value and power of the work ethic. (Note: intellectual capital in this context is not restricted to intelligence capital.) Although the construct of the work ethic has many different tags that have been applied in the workforce (e.g., life skills, soft skills, employability skills, etc.), the lack of work ethics has been deemed as a national crisis in many recent studies (Boston Area Advanced Technological Education Connections [BATEC], 2007; Conference Board, 2007; Flynn, 2007; Ringo & MacDonald, 2008; The National Association of Manufacturers [NAM], 2005). According to BATEC (2007), "The case for soft skills might appear to be open-and-shut, given industry's strong endorsement. Paradoxically, despite the importance of employability skills, neither educators nor students appear to appreciate them as employers do (p. 33)."

As a result of this type of feedback from the workforce, Leadership Trenholm includes the development of intellectual capital as a major component of strategic leadership development. According to the Conference Board (2006), soft skills include written communications, professionalism as a work ethic, critical thinking and problem solving, oral communications, ethics as a social responsibility, teamwork and collaboration, diversity, and information technology application.

A similar set of characteristics has been used by Central Georgia Technical College (2011) to define characteristics of intellectual capital for students. The characteristics noted in Table 1 have been adapted in this paper to reflect the intellectual capital of strategic leaders; most of the attributes have remained unchanged from the original attributes suggested for student leaders.

Intellectual capital is defined as the core work ethic value system of the leader. Strategic leadership is an action-based process in which the individual bases decisions on core values intended to guard the institution against failure, lackluster performance, insensitive attitudes, poor student achievement, ineffective community support,

Table 1. Intellectual capital characteristics of the strategic leader

Characteristics	Description
Attendance	Is available and accessible to college personnel and individuals in the community by maintaining a presence throughout the influence of the community college
Character	Displays loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness, dependability, reliability, initiative, self-discipline, and self-responsibility
Teamwork	Respects the rights of others, respects confidentiality, is a team worker, is cooperative, is assertive, displays a customer service attitude, seeks opportunities for continuous learning, demonstrates mannerly behavior
Appearance	Displays appropriate dress, grooming, hygiene, and etiquette
Attitude	Demonstrates a positive attitude; appears self-confident; has realistic expectations of self, the college, and the community
Productivity	Is a leader and motivator of productive energies applied to positive outcomes throughout the college and the community; utilizes resources to maximize outcomes to meet the needs of the workforce and service area(s)
Organizational Skills	Manifests skill in prioritizing and management of time and stress; demonstrates flexibility in handling change; is an effective collaborator in shared governance
Communication	Displays appropriate nonverbal (eye contact, body language) and oral (listening, telephone etiquette, grammar) skills; is a strong advocate of social networking
Cooperation	Displays leadership skills; appropriately handles criticism, conflicts, and complaints; demonstrates problem-solving capability; maintains appropriate relationships with peers and subordinates; effectively uses the chain of command, but is not inflexible or demanding beyond reason
Respect	Deals appropriately with cultural/racial diversity; does not engage in harassment of any kind; supports all differences in individuals

Adapted from Central Georgia Technical College. (Source: http://www.centralgategatech.edu/general/instructional/work_ethics.html).

and all types of improper matters negatively impacting institutional significance. In other words, intellectual capital is the guiding principle of the strategic leader in promoting, sustaining, and advancing institutional significance. A strategic leader seeks above all else to ensure that the community college is a prime responsive asset to its entire service area, leaving no stone unturned to support the community and the workforce. Table 1 indicates the characteristics of the strategic leader.

Although intellectual capital is a major portion of developing strategic leaders within Leadership Trenholm, strategic leadership also is the driving force for the development of technical skills in the institution. As noted by the Conference Board (2006), in today's highly complex global marketplace, technical skills are no longer within the sole purview of the U.S.; in fact, technical skills have been dubbed as a "globally sourced commodity" (BATEC, 2007, p. 19). Friedman (2007) noted that jobs are going to those who demonstrate the motivation to do a job well. The problem addressed is not that the educational system in the United States is a failure, but that the educational system is suffering from what Friedman termed "the ambition gap" (p. 354). The ambition gap is related to the intensity students demonstrate in learning, or what Friedman identified as a "passion for learning" (p. 355). What does this mean for the strategic leader in the community college?

Community college technical skills include some form of information technology (IT). IT is based on computer systems, whether those systems are diagnostic tools in the automotive industry or Java-programming web site design throughout the global Internet. According to BATEC (2007), "If US students can offer employers something in addition to rote technical skills, they often represent a better value proposition than their foreign competitors; [employers] discount basic IT skills and candidates are differentiated by the creativity, passion, and effectiveness with which they apply whatever skills they have. It is these traits employers look for" (p. 19). The concept of the "globally sourced commodity" falls squarely on the shoulders of the strategic leader who promotes, sustains, and advances institutional significance. How?

First, Leadership Trenholm educates future leaders with the knowledge that global competition is no longer removed from the local community college. And, second, the development of strategic leadership requires that leaders in the community college use their intellectual capital to motivate students, faculty, and the community to work together to not only build intellectual capital in students and faculty, but also create innovative methods to go beyond the norm of technical skills as a "globally sourced commodity." Stated differently, strategic leaders are guided to think beyond global competition for

students entering the workforce, to *competitive advantage* for those students entering the global workforce. This advantage is derived from advanced leadership thinking. Leadership Trenholm promotes strategic leadership as a methodology to address global competition at the local level, which includes technical skills and intellectual capital. How can strategic leaders use intellectual capital to infuse the workforce with employees with advanced skills? One simple response is social networking.

Once the leader has forged the bond between global commodity skills and intellectual capital, the process must also include elements of effective social networking. Social networking is the process whereby systems or structures are used to accomplish collaboration throughout the organization and for the purpose of promoting, sustaining, and advancing institutional significance. Social networking bridges all elements within the sphere of influence of the local community college. Leadership Trenholm fosters the development of social networking skills to empower future leaders as excellent communicator-collaborators. As excellent communicator-collaborators, strategic leaders guide the college, with its extensive capabilities, toward maximization of institutional significance. For example, Leadership Trenholm empowers potential leaders with the insight to view the college as a conduit of open communication flow. That is, social networking is viewed as fluid channels of information flow, both formal and informal, to promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance. Channels of information flow include, but are not limited to, structured e-mail usage, text messaging, an interactive and intuitive web presence, data access, informal committees, formal committees, community service, job shadowing, and all other forms of interactive communication.

The development of strategic leadership addresses methods, materials, and manpower issues to achieve institutional significance. Leadership Trenholm approaches the development of its future leaders with its own unique brand of intellectual capital and social networking. The goal of Leadership Trenholm *is* to prepare for the future by developing dynamic leaders today. These dynamic leaders create a culture of inquiry in which practices are challenged, followed by progressive solutions to promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

1. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' (The implication in this axiom is that without a vision for the future, community

- colleges will become reactionary institutions. The development of institution-wide strategic leadership in community colleges is a vision whose time has come. Where there is no strategic leadership development, the community college will perish (or subjugate its existence to the status quo).
2. Institutional significance is no longer optional. Each community college must provide economic drivers and essential community resources to its service area, thereby significantly impacting the workforce of the United States. These elements of institutional significance are no longer options when the global economy is included. Community colleges are not isolated islands of education; these institutions are significant forces in the overall process of preparing individuals to enter the workforce ready for work and prepared to use their intellectual capital as a lever to promote, sustain, and advance the national economy.
 3. Global competition is as much a concern of the community college as any workforce entity in the international economy. Community colleges must cease to think *only* in terms of their local service areas. Students must be prepared to enter a workforce which competes internationally. Therefore, the implication is that skills development, intellectual capital, and social networking are key codependent elements in the training and education of each student.
 4. Current administrations are responsible. Current community college administration is responsible for initiating the development of strategic leadership in the local colleges. Local leaders, from presidents to deans, are the authority figures who have the institutional resources required to promote strategic leadership programs. Without the initiation of these programs, in 5 to 10 or 15 years the permeation of strategic leadership is more likely to not have become a de facto standard in the community colleges across the United States.
 5. Leadership Trenholm is open to collaborative efforts to improve community colleges across the nation. Sharing the success of the program is a primary goal of the program, and Leadership Trenholm seeks feedback and data from other community colleges.

SUMMARY

Leadership Trenholm is a program to create layers of strategic leadership throughout the institution. The purpose is to develop

strategic leaders who will promote, sustain, and advance institutional significance. The advantage of in-house leadership development is the understanding that successful candidates will have in regard to the culture of the college and how this culture might be developed as a culture of inquiry for success and improvement across all operations and outcomes of the college.

Leadership Trenholm develops strategic leadership so that methods, materials, and manpower are utilized to maximize institutional significance. Moreover, the strategic leaders in the program also learn the methodologies associated with the Original Case Study Design. The OCS D is based on building intellectual capital, the maximization of skills acumen, and the application of social networking. These three facets of the OCS D are the foundation for strategic leadership to flourish in the community college.

Assuming that the forecast reduction in leadership is a viable concern, it is vital that community colleges begin an immediate process to develop local leaders. By being proactive today in developing strategic leaders, tomorrow's anticipated leadership crisis may no longer have the potential negative impact on institutional significance that it may have had without insightful action.

As noted by Fitzgerald (2008), "Unless today's [educational administrators] CIOs take the time now to invest in tomorrow's leaders, what looms ahead is a potential leadership void that threatens the value proposition of IT [education], the legacy of the profession and the very health of business and the overall economy" (p. 38). Leadership Trenholm seeks to address this crucial leadership issue.

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