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Preparing future leaders in higher education: excellence practices from staff to mid-level management role transitions

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PREPARING FUTURE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXCELLENCE PRACTICES FROM STAFF TO MID-LEVEL MANAGEMENT ROLE TRANSITIONS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES vi

LIST OF FIGURES vii

DEDICATION viii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ix

VITA x

ABSTRACT xi

Chapter I: Introduction 1

- Statement of the Problem 5
- Purpose of the Study 6
- Research Questions 7
- Significance of the Study 7
- Assumptions of the Study 8
- Limitations of the Study 9
- Definition of Key Terms 9
- Organization of the Study 11
- Summary of Chapter I 12

Chapter II: Review of Literature 13

- How the Best Leaders Build Trust 13
- Character-Based Behaviors 14
- Competence-Based Behaviors 15
- Character and Competence Behaviors 16
- Understanding the Leader 16
- What a Leader Does 17
- Understanding Management versus Leadership 17
- Creating a Culture of Leadership 18
- Transformational Leadership 19
- Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model 21
- Transactional Leadership 24
- Emotional Intelligence 25
- Tuckman's Stages of Group Development 29
- The Importance of Understanding Group Development 32
- Situational Leadership 32
- Authentic Leadership 35
- Happiness as a Component of Change in the Workplace 37
- Motivation and Happiness 42
- Factors and Characteristics of Happiness 47

The Nature of Change and Leadership 53
Summary of Chapter II 55

Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology 57

Nature of the Study 58
Restatement of the Research Questions 58
Qualitative Design 58
Methodology: Phenomenological Approach 61
Research Design 62
Interview Protocol 70
Statement of Researcher Bias 82
Data Analysis 85
Summary of Chapter III 89

Chapter IV: Findings 91

Participants 93
Data Collection 94
Data Analysis 95
Inter-rater Review Process 98
Data Display 100
Research Question One 101
Research Question Two 125
Research Question Three 139
Research Question Four 153
Chapter IV Summary 161

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations 164

Summary of the Study 164
Discussion of the Findings 166
Implications of the Study 178
Study Conclusion 191
Recommendations for Future Research 193
Final Thoughts 194

REFERENCES 196

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Notice 206

APPENDIX B: Interview Questions 207

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form 208

APPENDIX D: Interview Recruitment Script 211

APPENDIX E: Sample Reminder Email 212

LIST OF TABLES

Page

Table 1. Relationships among the Variable, Data Sources, and Respondents 73

Table 2. Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions 74

Table 3. Dates of Participant Interviews 96

Table 4. Inter-rater Coding Table Edit Recommendations 100

Table 5. Summary of Themes for Four Research Questions 163

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

Figure 1. Important challenges experienced as a mid-level leader in higher education ... 103

Figure 2. How individuals were made aware of their challenges as mid-level leaders. ... 112

Figure 3. Difficult experiences cited when transitioning into a new mid-level position ... 115

Figure 4. Extent of impact on the mid-level interview participant’s career path ... 118

Figure 5. Suggestions for better preparing mid-level interview participants for challenges previously described ... 126

Figure 6. Previous training and preparation that assisted mid-level Interview participants in overcoming challenges previously described ... 129

Figure 7. Resources that can be made available by an institution to prepare new mid-level leaders for a successful transition ... 132

Figure 8. Positive leadership techniques and methods that have worked in defining a mid-level position and leadership style ... 135

Figure 9. Elements of a successful transition to mid-level management ... 141

Figure 10. Ways the elements of a successful transition can be measured and tracked ... 147

Figure 11. Methods employed by current mid-level leaders to track personal progress ... 149

Figure 12. Advice or cautionary measures given to those aspiring to mid-level leadership positions ... 154

Figure 13. Optional responses to “Is there anything else you wish to add?” ... 160

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my family; all First Generation College, Graduate students and Professionals as they embark on or complete their academic journeys; and my best friend who was like a brother to me, Keith Shawn Smith.

For my family: Although I can't list everyone because our loving family is just too affectionately large, I would like to specifically dedicate this project to my immediate family who have been along with me nonstop throughout my entire academic journey. To my mother, Jarita; my father, Kelvin; my sister, Latasha; my grandparents: Teasie and Clarence Davis; and last, but not least, Aunt Honey, Uncle Robert, and Aunt Diane. Thank you for your love and support. I hope I continue to inspire and make you all proud!

For First Generation College, Graduate Students, and Professionals: coming from a person who is also a First Generation Student and Professional, embrace your greatness! Whatever you are currently considering that could positively impact your life, there is no greater time to act than now. Start making small steps to get to where you ultimately want to be… Don't wait! Take steps now that will make your future self proud. Never let anyone tell you that you are not enough, that you are not ready, or that a task is impossible. Never give up on your dreams; it can be done!

In the words of my very best friend, Keith Shawn Smith, "KEEP IT MOVING!" These words have kept me going even when I wanted to stop at times. Keith, I know you are smiling and proud of my accomplishments and would be in the front row with my family cheering me on during commencement day, if you were here. Yet, you still have the best seat in the house! You are gone, but never forgotten!

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VITA

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ABSTRACT

Mid-level leadership is key to a functioning university and it is important that mid-level leaders feel they have the tools and resources they need in order to succeed. To be successful in a new mid-level leadership position, entering supervisors must clearly communicate a strong sense of vision, values, and principles to their staff and establish positive relationships to encourage inclusivity, support, and effectiveness. The purpose of this study was to determine what higher education institutions can do to prepare staff for a successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles successfully. This purpose was achieved by identifying successes and challenges that current mid-level leaders at higher education institutions have experienced while transitioning into their current or past roles, and examining how they were able to successfully employ their leadership and navigate pitfalls in their new mid-level leadership positions.

Data were collected from 15 mid-level leaders in higher education in the form of a 13-question, semi-structured interview format, which focused on their past recollections of transitioning into a mid-level leadership role. The key findings of the study yielded 54 themes that answered 4 research questions. In particular, being a supervisor and a colleague was the primary challenge associated with mid-level leadership. Additionally, study participants indicated that having a comprehensive training/onboarding program, specifically for mid-level leaders, would allow for a better chance of a successful mid-level transition into a new campus environment or department. As a result of the study findings, a framework of advice emerged for aspiring and current mid-level leaders transitioning into a new mid-level role and suggestions for effective initiatives that higher

education institutions could employ was provided to assist in helping a new mid-level leader successfully transition into one’s role.

Keywords: mid-level leadership; onboarding; transition; higher education

Chapter I: Introduction

In today's workplace, 60% of new managers fail in their roles within the first 24 months and 47% of new supervisors receive no supervisory training (Bishop, 1991). In agreement with these percentages, Guess (2013) suggested that organizational leaders in for-profit and nonprofit organizations are not given the proper training needed to effectively oversee a team of individuals entering into a new leadership role. Based upon research of 1,050 organizational leaders from across the United States, two facts were determined from the findings: (a) less than 10% of organizational leaders were prepared for a leadership role before or after promotion, and (b) approximately 65% of leaders learned leadership by guessing how to lead people (Guess, 2013).

Bell (2013) asserted that it takes a certain individual who possesses the charisma, wit, resiliency, communication skills, and vision to lead a team toward a common goal in the execution of effective leadership. This type of leadership includes having the ability to overcome struggles, understand the individual and the group, and foster a sense of urgency that inspires change. These skills are important in a higher education environment, as mid-level and director-type roles interact with a variety of subordinate individuals' skills sets on a daily basis. Mid-level leaders are an essential component of higher education, and their mentoring capabilities and expertise levels continue to be one of the largest areas and support sources for growth within college and university environments (Grassmuck 1990, 1991; Lee, 1997; Montgomery & Lewis, 1995; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1992). These essential individuals in mid-level positions manage multiple responsibilities in higher education, as they are expected to interact and collaborate with students, faculty, and the public while quite often having to simultaneously reflect their institution's overall essence and vivacity. An individual can find these mid-level leaders embracing roles that allow them to play a pivotal role in four areas of higher education: academic support, business/administrative services, external affairs, and student affairs (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2000).

Leadership is not an event; it is a process, and more so, an art (Hulsh, 2012). As a mid-level leader, one is *leading from the middle*, creating and communicating information to individuals who work as a whole to foster the mission of the university. As a result of leading from the middle, mid-level leaders must often find balance between senior-level leaders' directions and the needs of those who require their support and service. These mid-level leaders must be able to navigate concurrently through the political labyrinth (Flanders, 2008). Mid-level leaders encounter challenging tasks of trying to keep stakeholders content while responding to continuous organizational modifications and challenges. Lacking this balance sets a leader up for failure. For example, these individuals are the ones who are entrusted to monitor policies and procedures while seldom having the option to alter or improve the directives they must administer (Rosser, 2000). Maxwell (2005) described leading from the middle as the optimal place from which to exercise influence, with *influence* being the key ingredient of leadership. Leaders who are able to balance the confluences of these forces, influencing the actions of individuals above, beside, and below themselves in an organization are the most successful leaders. Within the concept of leading from the middle, a mid-level leader is able to lead his or her supervisor, across to his or her peers, and down to individuals for which he or she is responsible. As a mid-level leader, in order to influence those one supervises, it is important that one knows how to add value to each of his or her followers' work lives. Placing followers in positions that will provide them a chance to grow and succeed can accomplish this practice of adding value. By doing so, these individuals begin to develop and maximize their potential and recognize how to utilize their strengths to become full contributing members of their teams. Subsequently, this builds a leader's influence and success in his or her role, whether as a novice entering into a new position, or as an already established leader.

Guess (2013) posited that the reason managers are promoted into leadership roles is often due to these individuals possessing technical expertise, rather than leadership competencies. This theory seems to support the fact that if an employee has significant technical expertise and is an above-average performer, he or she will also be good at leading people once promoted, but these are two different skill sets. The technical expertise and knowledge of a role is important, but how to mold and articulate these skills to an audience through actions and reactions is more critical in developing an environment of trust as a leader. Trust means confidence and competence, and it always affects two outcomes: speed and cost (Covey, 2006). As Covey (2006) noted, "When trust goes down, speed goes down and cost goes up" (p. 1). In regard to organizational performance, Covey focused on the methods for building relationship trust through 13 consistent behaviors that require a combination of both character and competence. Covey suggested that in order to build relationship trust, a leader must do the following: talk straight, demonstrate respect, create transparency, right wrongs, show loyalty, deliver results, improve, confront reality, clarify expectations, practice accountability, listen first, keep commitments, and extend trust.

In regard to management in higher education, mid-level leaders must be agents of change (Santiago, Carvalho, Amaral, & Meek, 2006). As mid-level leaders are typically at the center of controversy and debate—playing the role of college leader, university representative, consensus builder, mediator, and facilitator—their knowledge and expertise is vital to the success of universities (Rosser, Johnsrud, & Heck, 2003). Leadership and management in higher education involves three fundamental tasks: (a) creating a *holding* environment (an environment that facilitates achievement of goals); (b) directing, protecting, orienting, and managing conflict and shaping norms; and (c) maintaining presence and poise (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). These three tasks indicate competent leadership, which is imperative to the continued existence of programs and divisions and to higher education institutions as a whole (Thrash, 2009).

Academic institutions represent a unique setting in comparison to private or public sector organizations. Leaders of private organizations are primarily driven by goals of increasing shareholder value. Those who manage government agencies and public sector organizations are primarily concerned with goals of increasing the value to stakeholders, including communities at large (Sathye, 2004). Conversely, within academic institutions, increasing stakeholder value denotes enhancing value to stakeholders, an assemblage primarily composed of students, staff, community, and funding agencies. Stakeholders in schools are more varied, requiring academic institutions to carry a different set of challenges and expectations for mid-level leadership (Sathye, 2004). These circumstances suggest that although academic leadership has some general leadership similarities to private or public sector organizations, there are special challenges to effective execution of mid-level leadership in higher education. However, formal leadership training is all but absent in universities, as many leaders rise from an academic background as faculty to mid-level leadership positions (e.g., Vice President for Academic Affairs; Portney, 2011). There may also be variations in the leadership styles of current student affairs leaders based upon their background, years of experience, number of subordinates, education level, and natural style (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). As a result, the inability of comprehensive mid-level leadership training programs to produce consistent, quality mid-level leaders in higher education leaves an important problem to be addressed in this field.

Statement of the Problem

Staff advancing to mid-level leadership positions from entry-level positions in higher education often experience difficulties in successfully transitioning into their new roles without proper orientation provided by their respective institutions. Most entry-level professionals that may be entering into their field from a graduate program, such as those working in Residence Life, gain extensive training and orientation experiences within higher education as they transition into their roles to prepare them for success for the new academic year. Senior-level leaders are seasoned in the field, possess a vast network, and need little training and preparation entering into their roles, as they have more opportunities to build upon their previously acquired professional development on an as needed basis (Rosser, 2000). Mid-level leaders play an important role on campus, which is generally articulated in how well they navigate the confluences of organizational challenges; the objectives and responsibilities of their specific roles; and their unique abilities, experiences, and inspirations. These leadership foundations will determine their success in transitioning into their new leadership position (House, 2012).

However, the initial components needed for transitioning into this role (such as adequate time for proper orientation, what it means to acquire a new team as a mid-level professional, and learning how to leverage one's skill set to maximize new leadership responsibilities) are not widely supplied by higher education institutions (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). As such, the need exists to identify and provide a foundation of career advancement programs for professionals transitioning from entry-level to mid-level leadership roles within various higher education institutions, as compared to what individuals receive during their orientation into a new or first-time entry-level job in their respective institutions. This career advancement program should be specialized to the mid-level leader's particular area of responsibility, but also be consistent with what is expected from all mid-level leaders in higher education to ensure quality. This includes, but is not limited to the following: managing and understanding the needs of overseeing professional staff, possessing characteristics and skills needed while transitioning into a new role, power mapping, taking ownership of one's role, and providing effective strategic planning for organizational success during this transitional period.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what higher education institutions can do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles successfully. This purpose was achieved by identifying successes and challenges that current mid-level leaders at higher education institutions have experienced while transitioning into their current roles, and examining how they were able to employ their leadership and navigate pitfalls successfully in their new mid-level leadership positions.

Research Questions

This study explored the following research questions:

1. What challenges do higher education institutions face in preparing staff for mid-level management and leadership roles?
2. What can higher education institutions do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles?
3. How do higher education institutions measure their success in preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles?
4. What recommendations do higher education institutions make for creating successful career advancement programs?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will provide exemplary current practices for individuals transitioning from entry-level to mid-level roles in higher education to successfully enter into new mid-level roles with minimal obstacles. This will allow the new leader to have the ability to *hit the ground running* in his or her responsibilities and foster a culture of efficiency and effectiveness in the work environment. Additionally, this individual will be able to lead his or her team to successfully accomplish the mission of the institution and goals of the department while maintaining a healthy work/life balance. Although institutions differ in policies, expectations, and job descriptions for mid-level professionals (Rosser, 2000), there is a general expectation of what and how a mid-level leader should perform in order to effectively manage from the middle, and also lead one’s team in alignment with the university’s mission and departmental goals. Results from this study will enable higher education institutional leaders to learn first-hand from those who previously transitioned from entry-level to mid-level positions what is needed in a comprehensive career advancement program to produce quality mid-level leaders as they transition to new mid-level leadership from entry-level roles. As such, the research findings will also allow higher education institutions to create consistent training and orientation programs that produce quality mid-level leaders, furthering the efficiency of the organization.

Assumptions of the Study

1. It is assumed that new mid-level leaders transitioning into their roles from entry-level roles are not provided the appropriate training by their institutions to successfully transition into their new positions. This lack of training often results in a stronger possibility of the mid-level leader experiencing difficulties in assimilating into the culture of the institution and the department. Additionally, understanding the characteristics and employee dynamic of staff one will lead, developing an in-house network in a reasonable amount of time, and adopting current departmental best practices without a solid context as to why a practice is in place may prove difficult for a new mid-level leader.
2. The sample of interviewees consisted of current mid-level leaders in various roles in higher education institutions across the country. It is assumed that these individuals could speak competently, and knew first-hand what types of orientation experiences would be necessary to ensure the successful transition and quality of a new mid-level leader.

Limitations of the Study

1. This study was limited to 4-year public and private higher education institutions in the United States, and only considered the expectations and characteristics of mid-level higher education professionals within the country. This study was not an international one, assessing the commonalities and differences in regard to the expectations and characteristics of mid-level leadership in higher education.
2. This study was limited to 4-year public and private institutions excluding 2-year community colleges. Assessing the commonalities and differences as they relate to the expectations and characteristics of community college mid-level leadership in higher education is not considered.
3. It is indicated in the methodology section that the participant group will consist of at least 15 mid-level leaders. This moderately small sample size may constrain the generalizability of the findings.
4. Participants were intentionally selected, which may not reflect the interpretation of the larger population (Brancheau, Janz, & Wetherbe, 1996).
5. While objectivity was maintained throughout the study, it is addressed that the researcher also possessed professional and personal experience as an administrator in higher education.

Definition of Key Terms

Entry-Level: A term describing a professional staff member who works in a support role in a college environment. This professional may have just completed a graduate program that specializes in the field in which he/she now works ("Entry-level", 2016).

Higher Education Institution: An optional final stage of formal learning that follows secondary education. These institutions come in the form of 2-year or 4-year public or private schools, which include, but are not limited to the following: universities, colleges, academies, seminaries, vocational schools, trade schools, and institutes of technology (Higher Education Act, 1965).

Mid-Level Management and Leadership: Describes essential professional staff members in higher education whose administrator roles and functions support the goals and mission of the institution for which they work. These individuals interact frequently with students, faculty, staff, and the public. They are most often identified by the administrative units they supervise, including but not limited to the following: academic support, business/administrative services, external affairs, and student affairs (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2000).

Onboarding: A term describing a comprehensive orientation program for new staff in a higher education environment. This program may include structured trainings and/or mentor programs in addition to other elements based on the needs of the department and/or institution (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011).

Residence Life: A term describing the program that surrounds the student experience of living on and off campus in a residence hall at a college or university in North America. It is typically designed with planned events, a code of conduct and/or ethics, and a large variety of staff (National Association of College and University Residence Halls [NACURH], 2016).

Senior-Level: A term describing professionals who serve in strategic level roles in higher education. They create regulations, oversee mid-level leaders and their respective areas, and interact frequently with faculty and the public. Common roles include but are not limited to the following: President, Vice President of Student Affairs, and Vice President for Academic Affairs (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009).

Student Affairs: Typically a division at a higher education institution that provides support and resources for students to assist in their development and growth as an individual. This division frequently consists of departments and offices such as Housing and Residence Life, Dean of Students, and Campus Activities, for example (Taub & McEwen, 2006)

Work/Life Balance: A concept that focuses on successfully prioritizing and participating in *work* commitments (e.g. career and ambition) and *lifestyle* choices (e.g. health, family, and leisure) without becoming over-extended with obligations as an individual (Reynolds, 2004).

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I introduced the topic and problem, discussed the purpose of the study, and identified the four research questions. Additionally, this chapter reviewed the significance of the study, including assumptions and limitations, and defined key terms. Chapter II reviews relevant literature including but not limited to an analysis of how leaders build trust, emotional intelligence, Tuckman's stages of group development, authentic leadership, the happiness movement, and a discussion on transformational leadership. Chapter III consists of a restatement of the research questions, the research design and approach, a description of the population, data gathering procedures, plans for IRB approval, and the data analysis process. Chapter IV consists of the findings from the study. Chapter V summarizes the study based on the findings, which include recommendations on next steps for how to use the data for practical implementation. Additionally, recommendations for future study are also provided in this chapter.

Summary of Chapter I

Mid-level leaders are essential to the successful operation of a higher education environment. Entry-level professional staff members seeking to move into mid-level leadership positions are the future of higher education. As such, the development and implementation of a successful, comprehensive career advancement program that produces consistent, high quality mid-level leaders is imperative. This comprehensive career advancement program would equip individuals with the skills needed to address lesser known but still relevant issues that one may encounter when transitioning from an entry-level to mid-level position (Flanders, 2008). Additionally, providing as much preparation, experience, and opportunity as possible will help these individuals develop a solid professional network and employ successful leadership practices in their current role. By failing to receive this prospect, individuals may miss the chance to work on and fine-tune expected professional competencies as mid-level leaders in higher education.

Chapter I provided an outline of this research study, described the background of the problem, stated the problem, and highlighted the purpose of this study. Four research questions were proposed and the significance of the study was indicated. Chapter II will yield a review of relevant literature that will provide a foundational framework for the research.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Mid-level leadership serves an important role in higher education. As demonstrated by the following review of literature, leadership of mid-level leaders in higher education yields various resources for transferrable skills that can by applied to a variety of different leadership roles. The review of literature speaks to the purpose of this study and to the particular expectations and skillset needed from of a strong mid-level leader in higher education.

This comprehensive review will provide an understanding of how the best leaders build trust, the differences between management versus leadership, an assessment of *John Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model*, and how the transitioning new mid-level leader may be able to apply such change models in establishing sustainable organizational change. Additionally, transformational leadership and Maslow's hierarchy of needs will be discussed, and an overview of emotional intelligence will lead into a discussion regarding the power of happiness and authentic leadership. This material has informed the research and will contribute to the discussion of the interview findings.

How the Best Leaders Build Trust

When building relationship trust, Covey (2006) highlighted 13 consistent behaviors that require a combination of both character and competence. Character involves one's authenticity, motivation, and intent with people; competence involves one's skills, results, and track record. Both dimensions are fundamental to building trust. Covey suggested that in order to build relationship trust a leader must: talk straight, demonstrate respect, create transparency, right wrongs, show loyalty, deliver results, improve, confront reality, clarify expectations, practice accountability, listen first, keep commitments, and extend trust.

Character-Based Behaviors

Behavior #1: Talk straight. Be well defined in your discussions with your followers leaving no room for ambiguity. Be straightforward with individuals, which includes refraining from manipulation, distorting facts, or leaving false impressions (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #2: Demonstrate respect. It is imperative leaders model values of respect, fairness, kindness, love, and civility. By not doing so, a leader demonstrates disrespect to followers, which prevents trust, respect, and productivity from thriving in the work environment (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #3: Create transparency. Leaders should maintain openness and authenticity. Doing so allows followers to describe them as people that tell the truth in a way that can be verified, err on the side of disclosure, and reject the notion of hidden agendas (Covey 2006)

Behavior #4: Right wrongs. If a leader makes a mistake, he/she should not place the blame on everything and everyone but himself/herself. Instead, the leader should take action and make restitution, if possible, and learn from one’s mistakes (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #5: Show loyalty. Leaders should give credit to individuals who have earned it when the time arises without expecting repayment for one’s gratitude. Additionally, leaders should not speak ill or disclose personal information about individuals who have trusted them enough to share personal details about themselves (Covey, 2006).

Competence-Based Behaviors

Behavior #6: Deliver results. Leaders should look for small wins early in the transitioning process and utilize these wins to begin establishing a record of accomplishments. As a leader, one should be on time and on budget and refrain from concocting excuses for not delivering. Doing so will help the leader to develop or restore trust in regard to his/her competence levels (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #7: Get better. As a leader, one should administer organizational assessments to gauge current progress and future goals. Additionally, leaders should not be afraid to make mistakes, as this allows them the opportunity to continuously improve, learn, and grow (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #8: Confront reality. Leaders should step out of their comfort zone and not be afraid to deal with tough issues. By doing so, one becomes familiar with addressing difficult situations and can tackle them in a more efficient and effective manner. This practice affects speed and cost by encouraging open interaction and stronger engagement of creativity, capability, and collaboration of others in resolving issues (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #9: Clarify expectations. Leaders must make sure that expectations are clear and concise. If needed, one can renegotiate, but one should not go back on one's word after it has been communicated to one's team (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #10: Practice accountability. Leaders should practice self-governance for oneself and encourage this trait in one's team. A leader must uphold levels of responsibility and be clear on how his/her progress will be communicated (Covey, 2006).

Character and Competence Behaviors

Behavior #11: Listen first. Being a good listener is a critical skill to have as an effective leader. Possessing this skill allows one to sincerely understand another person's thoughts and feelings before trying to analyze and counsel. By listening first, one also begins to build a relationship of trust and respect (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #12: Keep commitments. Staying true to one's word is an easy way to establish trust in any relationship. In contrast, by breaking commitments, one will be seen as an unpredictable and unreliable leader; as a result, trust will begin to decline (Covey, 2006).

Behavior #13: Extend trust. In order for individuals to trust a leader, the leader has to trust them as followers. Unless information suggests otherwise, a leader should trust in his/her followers' abilities to complete their roles successfully and in turn they will reciprocate that trust (Covey, 2006).

Understanding the Leader

As 54% of nonprofit entry-level to director-level positions are not prepared for a transition into a mid-level leadership role (Guess, 2013), this study serves to remedy this issue by exploring practices and key concepts that should be employed at the college and university level. This will contribute to ensuring mid-level leaders transitioning into leadership roles from entry-level are effectively prepared to oversee individuals that they will supervise, and lead a department successfully within their first academic year. The first step to accomplishing this goal is to understand what a leader does, differentiate between management and leadership, and be able to define what type of leader you are as an individual.

What a Leader Does

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, leadership is quite different from management. Yet, both are significant for success in a progressively multifaceted professional environment. Furthermore, not everyone can master both leading and managing. Some individuals have the capability to become brilliant managers, but not strong leaders. Others have terrific leadership skills but, for a range of reasons, face hurdles becoming solid managers (Kotter, 2001).

As a mid-level leader in higher education, the real task is to integrate strong leadership and strong management and use each to complement the other. Once institutions recognize this essential difference between leadership and management, they can work toward grooming and preparing their mid-level leaders appropriately. Doing so will maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of individual departments and the institution as a whole (Kotter, 2001).

Understanding Management versus Leadership

Management involves dealing with complexity, whereas leadership involves dealing with change (Kotter, 2001). Both involve determining what needs to be done, building networks of people and relationships that can achieve an agenda, and ensuring that those people complete the job at hand (Bass, 1991; Kotter, 2001). Nevertheless, leadership and management accomplish these tasks in different ways. Companies manage complexity initially by planning and budgeting (setting short and/or long-term goals for the future), crafting detailed steps for accomplishing those goals, and then earmarking resources to complete those plans (Kotter, 2001). Alternatively, leading an organization to productive change starts by outlining a direction, which requires constructing a long-term vision of the future accompanied with tactics for generating the changes.

Management fosters the ability to accomplish its goals by mapping out a game plan and delegating responsibilities for accomplishing those goals, staffing the jobs with skilled individuals, articulating the strategy to those people, assigning responsibility and demonstrating accountability for following through on the plan, and formulating guidelines to oversee execution and effectiveness. However, practicing the concept of leadership aligns people. By effectively communicating the new concept to those that grasp the vision, a mid-level leader can create guiding coalitions that are dedicated to its achievement. Finally, management ensures the achievement of its goals by observing results versus the plan in some detail; recognizing abnormalities; and critically thinking, developing, and organizing to resolve the problems. In contrast, leadership requires encouragement and enthusiasm by keeping people progressing in the same direction, regardless of major difficulties, by satisfying simple but often-overlooked human needs (Bass, 1991; Grint, 1997; Kotter, 2001). These basic needs are defined intricately in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Huit, 2004).

Creating a Culture of Leadership

Individuals who are effective in prominent leadership roles often share a number of career experiences, the primary one being the ability to define what type of leaders they are as individuals. In higher education, mid-level leaders who are transformational are typically successful in their roles, as this type of leader is "essential within higher education so that adaptation can be completed to meet the constantly changing economic and academic environment" (Basham, 2010, p. 145).

Transformational Leadership

Various studies have demonstrated a correlation between transformational leadership and organizational effectiveness (Avolio, 1999; Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1995; Dumdum, Lowe, & Avolio, 2002). Transformational leadership is defined as "a style of leadership where the leader is charged with identifying the needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed members of the group" ("Transformational Leadership," 2016, para. 1). Transformational leadership can be seen when leaders and followers challenge each other to become better versions of themselves; research has identified positive correlations between transformational leadership and staff performances (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

An example of transformational leadership would be a new leader entering into a broken organization in which the work ethics and values of employees have strayed away from the organization's guiding purpose. This could be due to a number of factors, including but not limited to poor leadership by the past leader and a hostile working environment. In this example, the transformational leader would work toward realigning the work ethic, direction, and current perspectives inherent in the mission and vision of the organization while getting his or her new employees to feel passionate about the success of the organization and mapping out action plans to mitigate running into this type of concern again (Cavazotte, Moreno, & Hickmann, 2012). Once this initial goal is achieved, the leader can begin accomplishing more substantial goals with his or her team.

Transformational leaders are seen as agents of social and organizational change. They influence and encourage people by helping group members to see the significance and meaning of their tasks. These leaders are dedicated to the performance of group members, but also want each person to achieve his or her fullest potential (Bass, 1985; Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). Encouraging high levels of morality and motivation, these leaders inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work toward common goals while garnering trust, respect, and admiration (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 2003). Transformational leaders are energetic, enthusiastic, and passionate. They are able to control situations by conveying a clear vision of a group's goals. Additionally, they are concerned and involved in the process, focused on helping every member on their team succeed (Burns, 2003). Bass and Riggio (2006) described four different components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Idealized influence and inspirational motivation. Transformational leaders are the ideal example of a role model for their followers; these followers identify with them and aspire to be them. Transformational leaders demonstrate high levels of ethical conduct, persistence, and determination. They are willing to take risks and are consistent, rather than ephemeral (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Cavazotte et al., 2012). Transformational leaders conduct their behavior in a way that serves as a motivation and inspiration to individuals around them by providing meaningful challenge to their followers' work. The morale of the team, such as enthusiasm and optimism, is elevated. These leaders get followers engaged in envisioning future goals. They demonstrate a commitment to goals and the shared vision, and clearly communicate expectations that followers want to meet (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Transformational leaders question assumptions, reframe problems, and approach old situations in new ways in order to stimulate their followers' efforts to become creative and innovative. If an individual member makes a mistake, there is no public criticism. Followers are included in the process of addressing problems, finding solutions, and developing new ideas (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Acting as coaches or mentors, transformational leaders pay attention to each individual follower's need for achievement and growth by fostering a supportive climate and intentional interactions (Barling, Slater, & Kelloway, 2000; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Harms & Credé, 2010). The transformational leader's behavior demonstrates an acceptance of various personalities and backgrounds on one's team, highlighting and incorporating the strengths of each individual person into the greater whole of the team to make one solid effective unit. This leader feels comfortable delegating tasks as a means of developing followers and utilizes these tasks to see what areas of development still exist for the follower in order to provide proper support (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Cavazotte et al., 2012).

Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model

When an individual enters into a new mid-level role, changes are bound to occur within a department, including the initial transition of the new mid-level leader and the possibility of the new mid-level leader wanting to implement new strategies under his or her leadership. As a past consultant to various companies, Kotter (2012) observed the implementation and outcomes of hundreds of organizations of leaders at varying levels as they were attempting to implement new strategies. From these observations, Kotter was able to single out the success factors and amalgamated them into an eight-step process appropriately titled Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model. Kotter's eight-step process for leading change helps leaders successfully transform or execute strategies under their new leadership by adhering to the following steps.

1. Establish a sense of urgency about the need to achieve change – people will not change if they cannot see the need to do so.
2. Create a guiding coalition – assemble a group with power, energy, and influence in the organization to lead the change.
3. Develop a vision and strategy – create a vision of what the change is about, tell people why the change is needed and how it will be achieved.
4. Communicate the change vision – tell people, in every possible way and at every opportunity, about the why, what, and how of the changes.
5. Empower broad-based action – involve people in the change effort and get people to think about the changes and how to achieve them, rather than thinking about why they do not like the changes and how to stop them.
6. Generate short-term wins – seeing the changes take place and recognizing the work being done by people toward achieving the change is critical.
7. Consolidate gains and produce more change – create momentum for change by building on successes in the change, invigorate people through the changes, and develop people as change agents.

8. Anchor new approaches in the corporate culture – this step is critical to long-term success and institutionalizing the changes. Failure to do so may mean that changes achieved through hard work and effort slip away with people's tendency to revert to the old and comfortable ways of doing things. (Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo, & Shafiq, 2012)

A mid-level leader creating a sense of urgency demonstrates that he or she is dedicated to and excited about his or her role and working with his or her newly acquired team to challenge each other and become better versions of themselves. Once the mid-level leader demonstrates that engagement, which comes from learning about the culture of the institution through training sessions and interacting with community members who are invested in the community, this understanding will help build a guiding coalition.

Ensuring that a mid-level leader can successfully enter a new environment and lead a new team means that he or she must be able to develop and communicate a compelling vision to his or her followers. In this vision, the leader explains how the followers fit into the grand scheme of the plan and what the leader needs from his or her followers to help the department thrive as a functioning unit (Kotter International, 2016). This practice empowers employees to feel as though their thoughts and opinions on how to improve or advance for the following year will be taken into consideration, since in order for a leader and their group to know where they want to go they must first know where they have been. For an entering supervisor, relying on this past knowledge is critical in order to avoid making previous mistakes. This knowledge allows one to start planning short-term wins that will get followers excited for their new leadership as well as what the remainder of the year will bring. Consolidating these gains allows mid-level leaders to employ a continuous improvement cycle throughout the year in which they *plan*, *do*, *check*, and *act* (Bernal, 2015). This process will assess the strengths and weaknesses that went well the first year under their new leadership and anchor new approaches in their organizational culture to begin planning for a new year. Additionally, referring back to these eight steps and understanding the concept of transactional leadership in regard to emotional intelligence will allow transitioning mid-level leaders to maximize their ability to manage relationships, navigate networks, and influence and inspire their new team (Fletcher, 2012).

Transactional Leadership

The terms transformational and transactional have become fundamental to the study of leadership and are often used to distinguish leadership and management (Bass, 1991; Burns, 1978). Bass and Avolio's (1997) model of leadership encompasses three transactional leadership factors: contingent reward, active management-by-exception, and passive management-by-exception. *Contingent reward* speaks to the level upon which leaders will operate based on economic and emotional exchange moralities with followers. The leader constructs well-defined goals and expectations and acknowledges followers for working to accomplish those goals. In *active management-by-exception,* a leader observes followers for oversights and tries to course correct them. *Passive management-by-exception* speaks to leaders who wait for errors to occur before stepping in to resolve the issue (Harms & Credé, 2010).

A transactional leader and his or her followers generally share a mutual understanding of the purpose and expectations. The environment is typically "highly structured with an emphasis on managerial authority" (Basham, 2010, p. 146). As a result, this fashions a culture that lacks creative development and innovation due to the idea that individuals are primarily motivated by simple or extrinsic rewards for their job performance. An example of a transactional leadership environment occurs when old traditions and attitudes are ingrained in the culture of an organization and/or department that do not match the present-day needs (Basham, 2010). This type of leadership can be very alienating for new employees, make fostering solid relationships with colleagues difficult, and hinder employees' ability to get to know each other's strengths and weaknesses while trying to work toward accomplishing goals as an effective team.

Since *active management-by-exception* behaviors mirror *reactive* and *routine* leadership practices that require no intuition or empathy, it is not expected that this leadership task would have a relationship with the concept of Emotional Intelligence (Barling et al., 2000). As a result, it is likely that emotional intelligence would produce undesirable interactions with *passive management-by-exception*, as individuals with higher emotional intelligence are perceived to possess greater initiative and self-efficacy (Goleman et al., 2002). Additionally, transactional leadership may result in a lack of development in job satisfaction, as the primary drawback of employing *active management-by-exception* as a leader is not taking into consideration a follower's need for self-actualization (Dollak, 2008).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence (EI) was first introduced by Salovey and Mayer (1990) as a type of social intelligence. Social intelligence can be defined as "the capacity to successfully navigate complex social environments and relationships" (Social

Intelligence Lab, 2015, para.1). Said differently, EI is the ability to recognize and control one's own emotions and the emotions of others (Psychology Today, 2016). It consists of three skills: (a) emotional awareness, (b) the ability to amalgamate emotions and interpolate them into tasks, and (c) the ability to manage emotions (Psychology Today, 2016). Goleman (2005) identified five procedural components of EI: self-awareness; self-regulation; motivation; empathy; and social skill.

Self-awareness. Self-awareness equates to possessing a strong understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drive (Goleman, 2005). Individuals who possess self-awareness are realistic and "neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful" (Goleman, 2005, p. 3). They are authentic within themselves and with others. This trait also relates to an individual understanding his or her goals and values, having a solid plan, knowing which direction he or she is headed, and why. Individuals who lack self-awareness often make rash decisions based on unstructured values (Goleman, 2005). A phrase that suits this quality well is *an individual that fails to plan, plans to fail*. Self-awareness is relevant to leadership development because a leader must have a healthy balance between being hopeful and lofty in his or her goals for the department he or she will oversee, but also be realistic enough to know that not every plan he or she puts into place is going to work out. Having a clear understanding of these two extremes will allow a leader to be more efficient and effective in making rational decisions. Additionally, possessing self-awareness as a mid-level leader allows for an understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses and how that will correlate with one's leadership skills (Toegel & Barsoux, 2012). The leader will be able to capitalize on his or her strengths when leading his or her team. For skill areas that the leader may lack, he or she can seek that strength out in an individual that he or she may manage, and leverage that skill to provide value-added to the team. Concurrently, the employee can feel as though he or she is being recognized and appreciated for the skills he or she brings to the team (Toegel & Barsoux, 2012). This practice will lead to increased ownership of tasks and responsibilities within the team, which will subsequently encourage higher success rates of performance within the team.

Self-regulation. When an individual possesses self-regulation, he or she feels emotional impulses as others do, but is able to control his or her thoughts, feelings, and verbalizations regarding events that occur within his or her life. Self-regulated individuals think before they speak. This is important for a leader, as those who are reasonable and in control of their feelings are able to foster an environment of fairness and trust. Additionally, productivity will remain high within the team. Competitively, self-regulation is important when organizational changes exist. These changes can tend to cause confusion and a need for team flexibility in order to ensure that no work tasks fall through the cracks during departmental and/or leadership restructuring. Those leaders who can control their emotions and take changes in stride are going to be seen as someone who is calm, adaptable, and easy to work with. It is especially important that leaders possess these traits during crisis situations (Goleman, 2005).

Motivation. Goleman (2005) defined motivation as a trait whereby individuals are “driven to achieve beyond expectations- their own and everyone else’s” (p. 6). These individuals possess a zeal for the work itself, seek out creative challenges because they take pride in a job well done, and love to learn. They continue to push themselves to become better versions of themselves and remain optimistic in the face of challenges. These individuals want to see results and do so through tracking their performances as well as their team's. In contrast, those who possess wavering motivation do not see the value in results. High motivation translates to strong leadership, as when people set high expectations for themselves, they tend to do so for the teams they lead. This skill helps to foster a culture of intrinsic motivation among a group of colleagues that manifests as optimism and organizational commitment: two additional traits that are fundamental to leadership.

Empathy. Incorporating empathy into a leader's toolbox does not mean that one tries to please everybody by adopting their feelings as one's own; rather, it means "thoughtfully considering employees' feelings when making intelligent decisions" (Goleman, 2005, p. 6). Possessing empathy in leadership is important for three reasons: the increasing use of teams, the rapid pace of globalization, and the need to retain prime talent (Goleman, 2005).

This skill allows a leader to recognize his or her team's emotional makeup by understanding and sensing the viewpoints of everyone around the table. Empathy facilitates cross-cultural dialogues that could possibly lead to misunderstandings in which the leader is able to notice cues such as body language, read between the lines of what is said, and understand the importance and existence of ethnic and cultural differences. This trait also allows a leader to enhance his or her organization's productivity and effectiveness in subtle, but important ways, including coaching and mentoring talent within the team based on his or her current learning skills and improving job performance of individuals (Goleman, 2005).

Social skill. Social skill "is friendliness with a purpose: moving people in the direction you desire" and those who possess this trait "work according to the assumption that nothing important gets done alone" (Goleman, 2005, p. 6), as a leader's task is to get work completed through other people. An individual must possess social skill in order to manage relationships effectively and communicate his or her passions and visions to their followers. If a leader cannot communicate effectively with individuals then motivation will become nonexistent amongst the team, as followers will not be able to determine if the leader has genuine motivation for a task. Serving as an amalgamation of other traits of EI, "Social skill allows a leader to put their emotional intelligence to work" (Goleman, 2005, p. 6). By correctly pinpointing feelings in followers, leaders are able to respond to their needs more efficiently. Through communicating emotions adequately, leaders can create persuasive visions for followers and increase better goal acceptance (George, 2000). This will prove helpful as the team transitions through the stages of group development to accomplish and maintain team productivity at a superior level.

Tuckman's Stages of Group Development

Tuckman (1965) created a theory of group dynamics that refers to four primary phases of team development necessary for team growth based on his work with a team of social psychologists on behalf of the U.S Navy. During this time, Tuckman and his team of psychologists studied small group behavior from various perspectives, reviewing 50 articles on group development and discovering two features common to these small groups: the interpersonal or group structure and the task activity. He recognized that groups do not start fully functional and suggested that teams develop through clearly defined stages, commencing from their divide as a group of individuals to cohesive, task-focused teams.

These stages could be recognized by phases depicting a degree of conflict that would eventually resolve itself and allow the team to begin functioning as a whole, both personally and professionally. The team would eventually settle into a functional phase in which everyone’s strengths were leveraged to accomplish goals smoothly and add value to the team as needed between one another (Tuckman, 1965). These teams developed by facing up to challenges, tackling problems, finding solutions, planning work, and delivering results. To encapsulate these findings, Tuckman (1965) clearly outlined these descriptions into four stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, and performing. Ideally, a team will want to arrive at the performing stage. Understanding the stage of group development the team is currently in will help the mid-level leader streamline his or her leadership approach to developing the team and introducing change under his or her new leadership. Knowing these stages also helps the leader have intentional conversations in one-on-one and group settings.

Forming and storming. In the beginning of a group’s development, teams initially focus on getting to know one another, identifying boundaries such as interpersonal and task behaviors (Abudhi, 2010; Tuckman, 1965). In most cases, it is a calm time where people are just being introduced to new surroundings and changes and as a result have not had much time to process what has occurred. The most important task now is everyone working to find their footing and the role they will play on the team.

The storming phase is characterized by polarization or conflict among team members, typically in regard to interpersonal issues (Abudhi, 2010; Tuckman, 1965). For example, an individual may have difficulty interacting with a new or current colleague's personality, have trouble adjusting to a new leader, or may be experiencing burnout and as result is not contributing at the same intensity as his or her colleagues, which can also result in team friction. As a mid-level leader, balancing the hostility of these types of examples is of critical importance in order to maintain or begin to establish a high performing team. This balancing act may be a difficult feat if the previous leader left the team in a fragmented state with respect to group dynamics and/or individual responsibility. If these kinds of dynamics do emerge, understanding that the team is in the midst of the storming phase and what that means for the team will be important for a mid-level leader to know. As a result, this understanding will allow the mid-level leader to begin incorporating intentional conversations into settings such as staff meetings, one-on-one discussions, or casual conversations to determine the root cause of an issue and begin to remedy it.

Norming and performing. When a team is able to overcome the storming phase, accepting and working with each other's strengths and recognizing each other's weaknesses, group cohesiveness begins to develop, and new standards and roles evolve. The team then enters into the norming phase, during which individuals feel comfortable sharing intimate or personal opinions without fear of judgment and begin to rely on one another more often. When a team feels comfortable delegating tasks to one another without fear of disappointment, group energy and motivation are at an apex, and interpersonal structure and interaction are dominant, the team is said to have entered the performing stage (Abudhi, 2010; Tuckman, 1965). For the group, they are a *well-oiled machine*; roles become flexible, and individuals become supportive of task performance.

The Importance of Understanding Group Development

For a mid-level leader, understanding the stages of group development is of particular importance when fostering intentional interactions with members of the team. Once a team reaches the norming or performing stage, the mid-level leader will become comfortable delegating complex tasks to followers and trust them to represent the department in the best possible light. As a result, the mid-level leader can take on additional tasks and work toward creating initiatives requiring more complexity and time commitment that will represent the mission of the department, the university, and serve the students. Complementing the theory of group development, when a leader is able to tailor his or her leadership style to meet their staff members where they are developmentally, this practice is referred to as Situational Leadership.

Situational Leadership

Dr. Paul Hersey (1984) developed the theory of situational leadership. He describes it as *organized common sense*, a style of leadership in which the leader or the manager must adjust his or her style to match the developmental level of the followers he or she is leading. Situational leadership is a repeatable process that leaders can leverage to effectively influence others' behavior. Comparable to the concept of leading from the middle, a benefit of utilizing situational leadership is being able to skillfully influence others up, down, and across an organization by knowing when to be *consistent* and when to be *flexible*. To employ situational leadership effectively, a mid-level leader entering into his or her new role must first understand where the competency and commitment levels lie for each of their employees (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Hersey, 1984). From there, he or she will be able to construct intentional interactions with individual workers to begin to develop them as followers and burgeoning change leaders within the department. In assessing competence, a mid-level leader may want to understand what skill set or knowledge their staff brings to the job or if they have transferrable skills or knowledge. Further, a mid-level leader may want to understand an individual's level of motivation and/or confidence level (Hersey, 1984).

Hersey-Blanchard model. The Hersey-Blanchard model characterizes leadership in terms of the amount of task behavior and relationship behavior that a leader may provide to his or her followers. Exercising this model, leaders should be able to focus more or less weight on the task and more or less weight on the relationships with the people they are leading, depending on what is necessary to successfully accomplish the job. The model is based on the *readiness* level of those individuals the leader is trying to influence; readiness refers to which followers have the aptitude and disposition to accomplish a specific task. Aptitude is the understanding, experience, and proficiency that an individual holds to do the job. Disposition is the motivation and commitment required to achieve a given task. This style of leadership is contingent on followers' level of readiness (Hersey, 1984).

In terms of mid-level leadership, employing the Hersey-Blanchard model will allow a leader to be viewed as approachable, intentional, flexible, transparent, deliberative, supportive, and consistent. This model will show mid-level leaders how to assess individual skill levels to meet people where they are and coach them to become better versions of themselves through their work performance and interactions with others. The character styles are categorized into four behavior types: S1 - telling/directing, S2 - selling, S3 - participating, and S4 - delegating (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Hersey, 1984).

S1: Telling/directing. This leader behavior features a high task/low relationship, in which the leader clearly defines the roles of his or her followers and communicates the *what, when, where,* and *how* to complete varying tasks. It is categorized by one-way communication that flows from the leader to the followers (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Hersey, 1984).

S2: Selling/coaching style. This leader behavior implements a high task/high relationship. The leader supplies the information and direction, but there is more communication with his or her followers. The leader tries to *sell* his or her message to the followers to have them buy into his or her motivation and understand what is important to the department (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Hersey, 1984).

S3: Participating style. This style has a high relationship/low task focus, in which the leader focuses more on the relationship and people and less on direction. As the followers possess the appropriate and applicable knowledge, they feel empowered to make decisions. Additionally, the level of trust between the leader and the follower is high (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Hersey, 1984).

S4: Delegating style. This style is considered a low relationship/low-task leader behavior. In order to focus on higher-level commitments the leader passes the responsibility of tasks onto his or her other followers. The leader still keeps track and monitors the progress of his or her followers, but provides them the autonomy to take over more responsibility normally reserved for the leader (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Hersey, 1984).

Discussion. For the mid-level leader, this theory complements and is comparable to Tuckman's (1965) stages of group development in which the four leadership styles present in situational leadership can be interpreted and correlated to the stages of group development as follows: S1= forming phase, S2/S3= norming phase, and S4 = performing phase. Nevertheless, leaders consider no style favorable for consistent, universal use. It is up to the leader to determine which style works best based on the competency and commitment levels of their followers. The key takeaway from this model is that "situational leadership is not something you do to people but rather it is something you do with people" (Hersey, 1984, p. 46). In the same manner, while modeling situational leadership, it is important that a leader is self-aware and genuine in his or her strengths, limitations, and emotions. Furthermore, one should be able to put the mission and the goals of the department ahead of one's own and focus on the future in order to be successful in one's role. Being self-aware and genuine are also key components of the successful practice of authentic leadership.

Authentic Leadership

Regardless of an individual's tenure in a mid-level leadership role, mid-level leaders will interact with many individuals, each with his or her own agenda. With so many different views, values, and goals, it is easy for mid-level leaders to lose sight of the primary goal or mold themselves into becoming what they think they need to be in order to appeal to the masses. What is most important as a leader is that he or she remains his or her own person, authentic in every way (George & Sims, 2007). To successfully become an authentic leader, an individual has to develop his or her own leadership style consistent with his or her personality and character. George and Sims (2007) helped streamline this process by categorizing authentic leadership qualities into five dimensions: understanding your purpose, practicing solid values, leading with the heart, establishing connected relationships, and demonstrating self-discipline.

Understanding your purpose. Leading without purpose is the equivalent to leading without direction. Without leadership direction, followers will not be willing to follow, as they have no motivation to do so. Leading without purpose encourages the introduction of scope creep (projects that have seen their original goals expand while in progress adding unnecessary workloads to an individual) and being vulnerable to uncontainable impulses. To find one's purpose, it is important that an individual understands who he or she is as person, which includes understanding one's passions and motivations. Once these traits are understood, the leader must find an environment that complements him or her both professional and personally and enables him or her to thrive (George & Sims, 2007). Similar to EI, "Passion for one's purpose comes when one is highly motivated by one's work because one believes in his or her intrinsic worth, and can use their abilities to the maximum effect" (George & Sims, 2007, p. 15).

Practicing solid values and leading with the heart. A leader should know his or her *True North,* where he or she possesses truth, honor, and integrity in all of his or her interactions. As such, "leaders are defined by their values and characteristics" (George & Sims, 2007, p. 16). People need to know a person and trust a person before they agree to follow him or her. Being a mid-level leader in higher education means unlimited opportunities for interactions with people such as students, parents, faculty, and staff. As an authentic leader, one should be willing and open to sharing himself or herself with others and should be generally interested in others (George & Sims, 2007).

Establishing enduring relationships and demonstrating self-discipline. Incorporating empathy and social skills, an authentic leader should foster intentional relationships with individuals built on connectedness and a shared purpose of working together toward a common goal. Being open and listening to the stories of others allows for the development of trust between the follower and the leader (George & Sims, 2007). Similar to self-regulation, without self-discipline a leader cannot gain the respect of his or her followers. "Self-discipline allows leaders to channel their competitive nature toward their purpose" (George & Sims, 2007, p. 16). By not allowing stress to get in the way of one's judgment and remaining calm under pressure, self-discipline helps to convert good values into consistent actions and promote a culture of happiness in the work environment (George & Sims, 2007).

Happiness as a Component of Change in the Workplace

Regarding the first 90 days. Within the first 90 days of entering into a team, one of the primary goals that the leader must accomplish is learning the culture of the department. Additionally, he or she must also understand the personalities and work ethic of one's team. This consideration includes how the team members interact with one another. In an effort to understand the culture of one's team and department, a new supervisor should plan to accelerate his or her learning by going in with the mindset that learning is an investment process (Watkins, 2013). According to Watkins (2013), “effective learning gives you the foundational insights you need as you build your plan for the next 90 days “ (p. 47). As such, it is important for one to determine the most critical aspects to learn about their new organization and then learn that information as quickly as possible. The more efficiently and effectively one can learn their new environment, the more quickly they will be able to close their window of vulnerability.

Closing this window of vulnerability also allows the new leader to have an easier time identifying potential roadblocks that might derail him or her from accomplishing projected goals. The faster one overcomes the learning curve, the earlier one can begin to make good business decisions (Watkins, 2013). As such, to successfully plan to lead a department, a leader must identify the best sources of insight from which to derive the most accurate information in the shortest amount of time. This information can be obtained from knowledgeable sources such as mid-level colleagues of similar standing that have a good understanding of the organization and its past history. Additional resources include campus partners outside of the department that interact with the department on a regular basis or current employees on one’s team. Identifying these sources early will make a new leader’s learning experience both comprehensive and effective. Additionally, “it will help translate between external realities and internal perceptions, and between people at the top of the hierarchy and people on the front lines” (Watkins, 2013, p. 55).

It is important that new leaders transitioning into their position figure out in advance what the important questions are and how best they can answer them when learning about the culture and team they are inheriting. This consideration means being able to systematically think about one’s learning priorities (Watkins, 2013). To start one’s learning agenda, Watkins (2013) suggested defining it before one formally enters the organization by creating a list of guiding questions that focus on the past, the present, and the future. They will also give the leader initial talking points with employees as he or she begins to extract information from these employees about their experiences within the department. Questions for which a transitioning leader may want to seek answers should revolve around operations and the way things are done. Alternatively, they should consider the reasons behind why something is done, and learning if there was a valid reason for doing them. Additionally, a new leader should be aware of any upcoming changes that affect operations and would need to be considered when trying to decide what processes to keep and which ones to get rid of.

Understanding the culture of the new department and team that one will lead is important in one’s transitional success. Individuals who have experienced past leadership will serve as great resources to help one formulate next steps for potential change under their leadership. This information will also be valuable in establishing credibility with one’s team, in which the leader begins to rebuild the team by putting in place new team processes and managing the tension between short-term and long-term goals (Watkins, 2013). This practice will also open up avenues for easier buy-in from one’s followers in order to have everyone on the same page. Through these intentional actions, if everyone within the department is on the same page under the leadership of the new mid-level leader, then the positive morale of the team may have a much higher success rate. Additionally, happiness among the team as a result will yield higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness for productivity within the team.

The power of happiness. Measurement is one of the most important factors to consider when exploring ways to increase happiness (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2012). One can measure people's happiness by simply asking employees in a comfortable one-on-one setting how they feel about the current atmosphere of their work environment, which could range from discussion of interpersonal relationships to the work ethic of their colleagues. This practice is also one of the most effective ways to find out about the culture of a work environment (Watkins, 2013). Understanding the culture of a work environment as a new supervisor allows for a more successful transition into the organization and an understanding of individual team members' strengths and weaknesses.

Asking "whether [individuals] are happy, or satisfied with their lives, offers important information about the society. It can signal underlying crises or hidden strengths. It can suggest the need for change" (Helliwell et al., 2012, p. 7). Similarly, this questioning tactic can be utilized in the higher education work environment as an effective tool for a new supervisor to use when getting to know the culture of the organization and team (Watkins, 2013). Engaging the staff that is already in place affords the new mid-level leader an opportunity to assess the team's productivity level. However, there are more and less effective ways to go about gathering this information. A one-on-one meeting would consist of premeditated questions, with the same exact questions asked of every individual. This approach would ensure comparable answers that one "can line…up side-by-side and analyze what is consistent and inconsistent about the responses" (Watkins, 2013, p. 58). This information is also helpful as the mid-level leader begins to think about how to implement future change. Having that departmental history extracted from the *historians* or long-term members of the organization lends credibility to the new mid-level leader, allowing more buy-in for current staff since their decisions will be informed by the understanding and knowledge of current practices (Watkins, 2013).

Watkins (2013) suggested that the mid-level leader ask employees essentially the same five questions:

1. What are the biggest challenges the organization is facing (or will face) in the near future?
2. Why is the organization facing (or going to face) these challenges?
3. What are the most promising, unexploited opportunities for growth?
4. What would need to happen for the organization to exploit the potential of these opportunities?
5. If you were me, what would you focus attention on (p. 59)?

How employees answer these questions will allow the mid-level leader to learn about his or her new team and its politics. The mid-level leader will also be able to extrapolate which of his or her employees answers directly, who may be evasive, or who is prone to tangents. After the mid-level leader has conducted all one-on-ones with his or her employees, he or she can then distill these discussions into a set of observations, questions, and insights that can be shared with the team (Watkins, 2013). By doing so, the mid-level leader "will learn about both substance and team dynamics and will simultaneously demonstrate how quickly [they] have begun to identify key issues" (Watkins, 2013, p. 59).

Conducting these initial one-on-ones and group meetings allows the mid-level leader to demonstrate his or her understanding of the intrinsic motivation each of his or her employees possesses. It also demonstrates that as a mid-level leader, one has the ability to make good initial decisions founded on the right kind of learning (Watkins, 2013). This practice will help the mid-level leader's employees develop respect and trust for their leader. As a result, "as people come to trust your judgment, your ability to learn accelerates, and you equip yourself to make sound calls on tougher issues" (Watkins, 2013, p. 8).

Knowing what provides intrinsic motivation to an employee helps a transitioning leader begin to understand how to tailor his or her specific leadership technique to his or her employees. This exercise allows the mid-level leader to meet these individuals where they are developmentally through the practice of situational leadership (Hersey, 1984). It also allows the mid-level leader to leverage his or her employee's strengths by incorporating the employees into projects that suit their skill level. This practice of leadership will allow employees to feel as though they are being fully integrated into the team based on their particular set of skills while undergoing the confluences of change implemented by the new mid-level leader. It shows the employee that the mid-level leader has taken the time to get to know each team member as an individual to increase value-added skill sets within the department. This small but important detail adds tremendous support to maintaining happiness within the department.

Motivation and Happiness

Motivation is often described in terms of direction; encompassing a gamut of psychological processes that stimulate an individual toward accomplishing a goal and cause that person to keep pursuing that goal until it is accomplished (Sadri & Bowen, 2011). In terms of a department of employees, "motivated employees work harder, produce higher quality and greater quantities of work, are more likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviors, and are less likely to leave the organization in search of more fulfilling opportunities" (Sadri & Bowen, 2011, p. 45). Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs serves as an essential theory of motivation.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs. For the mid-level leader, understanding the varying levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs allows this individual to "design programs to motivate his or her employees, retain team loyalty, reduce turnover, recruit quality individuals, and ultimately increase productivity" (Sadri & Bowen, 2011, p. 45). Presented in the shape of a hierarchical pyramid, Maslow (1943) defined the five human needs from fundamental to most advanced as follows: physiological, safety, love/belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow believed that each need had to be completely satisfied by an individual in order to advance to the next level of the pyramid.

***Physiological needs*.** Maslow (1943) defined physiological needs as the most basic needs, which encompass the necessity for air, water, and shelter, as well as the need to be active, to rest, and to sleep. As a supervisor, one can contribute to the fulfillment of his or her employees' physiological needs by providing a comfortable work environment (Sadri & Bowen, 2011). As an entering mid-level leader, an example of what creating a comfortable work environment could look like might be providing basic office supplies needed by staff to ensure that they can perform the responsibilities of their job reasonably. Additionally, recognizing when a team member may be overwhelmed and allowing them time to decompress and take a break from their responsibilities allows for their physiological needs to be met.

Safety needs. Maslow's (1943) next level emphasizes the need to be safe from physical and psychological harm. One way safety in terms of the workplace environment can be represented is in the form of money: being paid to do a job in which the money provides one the means to secure a place to live (which simultaneously satisfies a physiological need as well). Additionally, higher education institutions provide employee assistance programs and counseling services that offer psychological security with professionals providing services to university employees. These services provide guidance for a variety of challenges, including conflict and stress at the workplace, personality disorders, and emotional difficulties (Sadri & Bowen, 2011).

Love/belongingness. The third tier in Maslow's hierarchy focuses on the desire to be loved, highlighting the need for affection and belonging (Maslow, 1943). "Individuals who are looking to satisfy their love/belongingness are likely to join or continue working at a company based on the relationships and social support mechanisms they have established or potentially expect to establish there" (Sadri & Bowen, 2011, p. 47). Examples of ways to foster this need within a professional setting can include developing a culture that promotes departmental luncheons and banquets or divisional semester recharges for student affairs and academic affairs departments. These recharges would recognize outstanding staff and their accomplishments in their respective areas. Additionally, building department-sponsored sports teams and mentoring programs may prove effective. The avenues of fostering this need are important. As higher education professionals, the primary focus is tailored toward students' needs and helping these individuals maximize their potential as future scholars, leaders, and change-makers in their respective fields.

Nevertheless, not providing a similar level of support to professional staff does a disservice to these individuals, as they may feel as though they are not being recognized and/or burn out may begin to occur. As such, two important sources of social support for employees fostering that recognition and belongingness are co-workers and bosses (Sadri & Bowen, 2011). Employing these sources builds a cohesive team, which in turn benefits the mid-level leader, as the employees in these teams are able to produce synergy: "output that is greater than the sum of its individual parts" (Sadri & Bowen, 2011, p. 47). A department then has the ability to become more efficient, fostering new and creative ideas by allowing employees to collaborate and work in teams to satisfy the need for belonging (Sadri & Bowen, 2011).

***Esteem needs*.** Similar to love/belongingness, esteem need includes "the need for responsibility, reputation, prestige, recognition, and respect from others" (Sadri & Bowen, 2011, p. 47). When an individual receives lack of recognition from his or her supervisor, he or she feels under-appreciated and as a result has a higher chance of leaving his or her job. As such, a fundamental motivator for most employees is simply receiving recognition and praise for his or her contributions to the team. This recognition is important as it lets the individual know that people appreciate what that person has accomplished. As an entering mid-level leader, it is easy to become caught up in the small details and everything else that is thrown onto one's plate within the first 90 days. As a result, one may forget about those who are helping behind the scenes with extra responsibilities, especially while the team recalibrates due to the recent leadership shift.

Examples of ways to implement recognition amongst a team setting include, but are not limited to the following: delegating additional responsibilities to individuals within one's team to assist in their career development, providing reserved parking spaces, conducting team outings, implementing staff appreciation week, and other recognition programs (Sadri & Bowen, 2011).

Self-actualization needs. The final level of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy is the need for self-actualization, characterized by an individual's need for self-fulfillment to become the best possible version of one's self. This level is only reached once an individual has satisfied the four preceding levels within the hierarchy. In addition to bettering oneself, this individual looks to helping better those around him or her and the world overall (Sadri & Bowen, 2011). As a mid-level leader, this is the level to which one should aspire personally, as this level is "used to inspire employees and to help them perform at their highest levels" (Sadri & Bowen, 2011, p. 47). Having a team that is trustworthy, is responsible and can self-govern will help the entering mid-level leader have a successful transition into the department and allow for a greater chance of productivity and efficiency in carrying out departmental goals without delay.

Discussion. The foundation of Maslow's hierarchy is that "employee motivation requires more than a good wage or salary" (Sadri & Bowen, 2011, p. 48). Motivation requires that as a leader, an individual recognizes what makes the individuals on his or her team unique, and as a result tailors interactions to them to meet them where they are developmentally. Additionally, not everyone is motivated in the same way. Therefore, it is important that the transitioning leader make it a point to get to know his or her team (Sadri & Bowen, 2011). It is easy to want to start out fast in order to *prove* oneself as the right person for the job but as a transitioning mid-level leader one has already secured the job; now one just needs to do it. Sometimes, one must start slow to move fast, but once that individual possesses the basic fundamentals in one's toolbox, transitioning into his or her respective role will be that much easier. A fundamental tool that should never leave a leader's toolbox is happiness.

Factors and Characteristics of Happiness

As a transitioning mid-level leader, delving further into the concept of happiness within an organization will help show him or her how to maintain this positive morale or how to develop it within one's team. This skill is accomplished effectively by understanding the key determinants of happiness from both an external and personal perspective. As an individual, everyone has his or her own genetic makeup, but the person an individual becomes depends on the interaction of those genes and "the environment one encounters these features in turn determine a person's well-being" (Helliwell et al., 2012, p. 59).

> In addition to *external* factors, a few key determinants of happiness include:
>
> - Income,
> - work,
> - community and governance, and
> - values and religion.
>
> Among the more *personal* features, a few key determinants [of happiness] include:
>
> - Mental health;
> - physical health;

- family experience;
- education; and
- Gender and age (Helliwell et al., 2012, p. 59).

When at work, the quality of life at work is crucial in regard to developing and maintaining happiness amongst one's team. In addition to intrinsic motivation being important within a work environment for an employee, intrinsic features of the job (rather than pay) as sources of satisfaction are important as well (Helliwell et al., 2012). These features include "a sense of overall purpose for the job, a degree of autonomy in discharging it, and the competence to do the job…. Aligned with this, people need support and recognition for their efforts" (Helliwell et al., 2012, p. 67). In doing so, worker well-being increases. The well being of a worker is a good predictor of productivity (Helliwell et al., 2012).

> It is well known that workers who are more satisfied with their jobs are less likely to quit their jobs. They are also less likely to reduce firm productivity via absenteeism or via presenteeism – "turning up to work, but contributing little." (Helliwell et al., 2012, p. 68)

Kjerulf (2007) offered 10 key reasons why happiness at work is the ultimate productivity booster:

1. Happy people work better with others.
2. Happy people are more creative.
3. Happy people fix problems instead of complaining about them.
4. Happy people have more energy.
5. Happy people are more optimistic.

6. Happy people are way more motivated.
7. Happy people get sick less often.
8. Happy people learn faster.
9. Happy people worry less about making mistakes - and consequently make fewer mistakes.
10. Happy people make better decisions (para. 3).

One striking finding of happiness research is that the time of day when people are least happy is when they are in the presence of their line manager. This finding suggests that many managers fail to inspire their workers and rely too much on mechanical incentives and command (Helliwell et al., 2012). Therefore, a mid-level leader must fully understand the concepts and importance of integrated organizational leadership as they transition into a new role. This understanding is in regard to creating and managing change, and understanding mistakes made by leaders.

Integrated organizational leadership. As a mid-level leader, one will either implement or enforce change within a department. In order to successfully implement change leadership, leaders should employ an integrated organizational model. This model consists of three elements: being strategic, engaging people, and managing the project (Skelton-Green, Simpson, & Scott, 2007).

Being strategic. This element is one of many requirements for successful change leadership, in which one is exceedingly cognizant of the choice of projects enacted in the first 90 days of residency in a new position and the timing of future projects. Kanter (1999) posited that the most significant factors a leader can bring to a changing organization are passion, conviction, and confidence in others. She noted that executives regularly announce a plan, launch a task force, and then expect that people will find the answers. In contrast, Kanter's recommended approach would be to pose a dream, broaden their horizons, and embolden people to do the same. One should be able to foster a strong sense of enthusiasm with the development of a compelling vision and values to guide the change. In addition, Skelton-Green et al. (2007) recommend as a leader being clear about the need for change and the desired goals or outcomes. To define the goals for a project, Skelton-Green et al. suggest that leaders "consider the challenges/problems their project will address; how their organizations functioning will be improved once the project is completed, and the extent to which the proposed project is consistent with strategic strategies" (p. 12).

Engaging people. This element includes identifying, analyzing, and enlisting the support of stakeholders who may not view a change initiative project as a high priority. Additionally, creating and launching a project team, in which a leader identifies the strengths and skills staff will bring to the team to participate and succeed, is a second component of engaging people (Skelton-Green et al., 2007). Kanter (1999) posited that change is created continuously and at many levels in an organization. Skelton-Green et al. (2007) suggest that mid-level leaders: (a) initiate a methodical process in which they distinguish stakeholders; (b) establish whether these stakeholders are likely to be influential, neutral, or resistant to the proposed change; and (c) formulate measured strategies to build alliances of supporters. This practice fosters a community of empowerment in which individuals need access to "informal and formal power structures, information, opportunity, support and resources, in order to be empowered" (Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, & Casier, 2000, p. 45).

Managing the project. Some leader initiated projects fail to gain traction due to leaders failing to ensure that their vision is converted into concrete steps, including deliverables, key activities, timelines, communication and accountabilities. It is imperative that these key elements are included in order for organizational change to be possible under one's new leadership, and at the bare minimum a project plan and evaluation strategy should be mapped out. If one is not detail-oriented, change plans can be derailed (Skelton-Green et al., 2007). As such, the project plan outlines the control and timing of change and identifies those who will be responsible for key elements and project deliverables.

As a leader outlines key milestones and target dates within a project plan, it is beneficial to keep in mind "the major steps that need to be undertaken; small wins you hope to achieve; and points at which you should pause to monitor your progress (and possibly re-adjust your plan)" (Skelton-Green et al., 2007, p. 22). As stated previously, while being detail-oriented is important, it is also important not to become obsessed with planning every detail or controlling others. Delegating and refraining from micro-managing is going to be key (Auster, Wylie, & Valente, 2005). As the plan is being prepared, it is suggested that leaders determine how they will achieve any necessary approvals, in which they consider the cost implications and distinguish the following: "required resources, including human resources, supplies, and capital as well as potential funding sources (e.g. donations, grants, and; potential savings)" (Skelton-Green et al., 2007, p. 23).

Kanter (1999) postulated that one of the missteps leaders make is to launch projects and then leave them. He suggests that leaders think about how they will support and gauge success from both a process and an outcome perspective. It is important that one be specific as to what they are going to measure, including who will be responsible for the assessment components, and the timing of the year that the assessment will be administered. The assessment steps and measures can then be incorporated into the project plan wherever they are needed. Incorporating professional and staff development opportunities into the project plan will also increase the probability of success and acclimatization by strengthening staff capabilities for constant learning and progression (Skelton-Green et al., 2007).

As a summary, prior to initiating a change initiative, Skelton-Green et al. (2007) suggest that a leader consider the following questions that touch on these three elements in order to enhance their chances of success:

1. Is the project strategic?
    a. What challenges/problems is this project going to address?
    b. How will your organization's functioning be improved once the project is completed?
    c. Is the timing good to embark on this project?
2. Will you be able to engage the necessary people?
    a. Who are the key stakeholders (person, groups) who are likely to be affected by or influential in the success of your project?
    b. Is there support from at least one stakeholder?
    c. Are there any highly placed opponents?
    d. Can you create the necessary project team to bring the project to fruition?

3. Will you be able to manage the project successfully?
    a. Is the project a manageable size and doable?
    b. Do you have adequate resources to manage this project? (Consider both human and fiscal resources).
4. How do you feel about the project?
    a. What excites you about the project? (Considering that you will be spending a lot of time and energy on this project over time, it is important to consider why you care about it).
    b. What concerns or frightens you about this project? What are you worried about?

The Nature of Change and Leadership

Supporting the three previously mentioned elements of change leadership, when making change as a mid-level leader, there are 10 key points that one must understand in order to be effective in one's respective new role:

1. A leader must first assess the need for change.
2. A leader envisions the future.
3. A leader should not change for change's sake.
4. A leader senses that the change is better than standing still.
5. A leader sets up a small coalition of like-minded individuals.
6. A leader creates a sense of necessity.
7. A leader metaphorically states that "if we don't get that Rover on Mars we will be behind the curve."
8. A leader celebrates small wins.

9. A leader changes and collects data.
10. A leader revises and reiterates. (J. Schmieder-Ramirez, personal communication, January 30, 2015)

Understanding these 10 guiding points helps a leader avoid encountering common mistakes made by leaders when implementing change. These common mistakes made by leaders are:

1. They go too fast (not unusual the first 1-1.5 years in the role).
2. They take people who are slower to adopt change personally.
3. They assume their friends will agree.
4. They don't use data in their needs assessment.
5. They underestimate "fear" involved in change.
6. They don't take into consideration "culture".
7. They are not the leader that should take charge of this change (they can't step back). (J. Schmieder-Ramirez, personal communication, January 30, 2015)

Additionally, six practices that a mid-level leader can do to lessen the fear of change are as follows:

1. Present the change clearly and simply.
2. Try to clearly show reasons for change.
3. Use data for support.
4. Take your time.
5. Plan the change well.

6. Lobby up and down the organization. (J. Schmieder-Ramirez, personal communication, January 30, 2015)

These steps prove most successful when working in tandem with Kotter's (2001) eight-step change model that allows leaders of all backgrounds to implement change across a diverse range of organizations.

Summary of Chapter II

EI, situational and authentic leadership, and transformational leadership work in tandem to produce the ultimate leader at any level in higher education. It is critical that these concepts are learned and ingrained in the leadership practices of a mid-level leader in order to maximize chances of long-term success in their respective areas.

Literature suggests that skills such as: understanding the stages of group development (Tuckman, 1965), possessing and encouraging motivation (Goleman, 2005; Watkins, 2013), understanding the hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1943; Sadri & Bowen, 2011), and infusing happiness and recognition into one's work environment (Helliwell et al., 2012; Sadri & Bowen, 2011; Watkins, 2013) can help mid-level leaders transition from one role to the next. Additionally, understanding the nature of change and leadership is beneficial to the transitioning leader regarding how to make change, avoiding encountering common mistakes when implementing change, and infusing practices that can help mitigate change (J. Schmieder-Ramirez, personal communication, January 30, 2015). Having a solid transition plan for the first 90 days complemented with questions that focus on the past, the present, and the future is critical in defining one's learning agenda (Watkins, 2013). Furthermore, a leader must understand the power of meeting followers where they are regarding their skill and knowledge level and infusing skills of coaching and mentoring to help them become better versions of themselves. This practice will serve the individual and the team well as they work toward becoming a more efficient and effective organization (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997; Hersey, 1984).

Maximizing the strengths of employees allows these individuals to feel comfortable being given opportunities for increased autonomy and enables the mid-level leader to take a step back and run the show, not *be* the show. In order to sustain organizational change and success, it is critical that the mid-level leader refer to Kotter's Change Model as an example of leading and managing change (Kotter International, 2016). This model will help an individual become successful within the first year of his or her new role, and begin to set him or her up for success in his or her second academic year of leading a team. Chapter III outlines the research design and data gathering process of this study. This outline will include a description of the population utilized within the study, a discussion of validity and reliability, and an explanation of the interview protocol.

Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology

Gathering and understanding the experiences of mid-level leaders in higher education, through their individual and personal recollections, was best achieved by employing a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2003). This chapter describes the method of qualitative research design utilizing a phenomenological approach and why it was employed for this study. The population and the method of sampling are discussed, along with the process of securing IRB approval, taking into consideration the human subjects of the study. Validity and reliability are addressed along with acknowledging any researcher bias. This chapter concludes with a look at the data analysis process and the formulation of the findings.

The purpose of this study was to determine what higher education institutions could do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles. This was achieved by identifying successes and challenges that current mid-level leaders at higher education institutions have experienced while transitioning into their current roles. Additionally, this study also examined how these individuals were able to successfully employ their leadership and navigate pitfalls in their new mid-level leadership positions. The importance of identifying and providing career advancement programs for professionals transitioning from entry-level to mid-level leadership roles within higher education was acknowledged in Chapter I. This chapter discusses the research methods that were employed to accomplish the purpose of this study and answer the research questions posed with the intent of designing a context for the research.

Nature of the Study

This descriptive study employed a qualitative approach in addressing the research questions proposed. The research questions informed the open-ended interview questions that were asked of selected participants. In agreement with Patton's (2002) suggestions for open-ended interviews, the questions proposed were designed to prompt "in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (p. 23).

Restatement of the Research Questions

1. What challenges do higher education institutions face in preparing staff for mid-level management and leadership roles?
2. What can higher education institutions do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles?
3. How do higher education institutions measure their success in preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles?
4. What recommendations do higher education institutions make for creating successful career advancement programs?

Qualitative Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design as the framework to collect essential data to answer the research questions. Donalek and Soldwisch (2004) posited that "qualitative research is the organized, systematic exploration of some portion of human experience" (p. 354). Qualitative research typically does not recognize the statistical interpretation of data, but instead the detection of mutual emergent themes. A qualitative research design was used as the foundation of this study, as the purpose of this study was to determine what higher education institutions could do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles. This purpose was to be achieved by identifying common themes within the successes and challenges that current mid-level leaders at higher education institutions have experienced while transitioning into their current roles, and examining how they were able to successfully employ their leadership and navigate pitfalls in their new mid-level leadership positions.

Within qualitative research, are made based predominantly on "constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern), advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented), or both" (Creswell, 2003, p. 18). This study incorporated both constructivist and advocacy perspectives.

Creswell (2003) postulated that "qualitative research is exploratory and researchers use it to explore a topic when the variables and theory are unknown" (p. 74). As there is a void in current literature that speaks to what higher education institutions could do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles, a qualitative research design was deemed the most suitable approach.

Aligned with this assumption, Morse (1991) highlights three characteristics representative of a qualitative research problem:

> (a) the concept is "immature" due to a conspicuous lack of theory and previous research; (b) a need exists to explore and describe the phenomena and to

> develop theory; or (c) the nature of the phenomenon may not be suited to quantitative measures. (p. 120)

This study's research problem possessed all three of the stated characteristics. No comprehensive theory has been formed on how professional staff transitioning from entry-level to mid-level leadership roles can do so effectively with assistance from their respective higher education institutions. This phenomenon needed to be explored in order to determine how schools can prepare staff for a successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles. The results of this study will help create effective career advancement programs for new staff at their institutions.

Typically, qualitative studies are characterized into two types of research: critical theory and interpretive (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2004). Critical theory is employed "to understand and critique power within society and consists of analyzing print materials, popular culture, and social structures" (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso, 2004, p. 149). Interpretive research is employed to comprehend a situation from the participant's viewpoint, which is accomplished through observation, examination of documents, and interviews (Evans, 2009; Locke et al., 2004). Interpretive research is most strongly aligned with understanding the strengths and challenges of professionals in higher education transitioning into a new mid-level leadership role from entry-level positions from their perspective.

Within interpretive research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection, in which he or she creates an extensive compendium of abundant data composed of comprehensive records regarding context, actions, people, and participants' insights. This data assemblage serves as the foundation for inductive generation of an explanatory theory (Crotty, 1998; Locke et al., 2004). The kind of interpretive research that was employed for this study was phenomenology.

Methodology: Phenomenological Approach

Employed frequently within qualitative research, phenomenology studies the significance of human experiences from the viewpoint of someone who has actually lived that experience (Locke et al., 2004). The phenomenological viewpoint is predicated on the belief "that reality exists only in the eyes and minds of beholders" (Locke et al., 2004, p. 154). In other words, one can best understand how higher education institutions can prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles based upon common themes emerging from interviews with current mid-level leaders. These themes emerged from past recollections of the successes and challenges current mid-level leaders at higher educations have experienced while transitioning into their current roles. Additionally, examining how these mid-level leaders were able to successfully employ their leadership and navigate pitfalls within their new mid-level leadership positions, as gathered from open-ended interviews, was imperative to this research.

Phenomenological research encompasses surveying a small number of subjects and forming patterns and connections of meaning based upon their important statements (Moustakas, 1994). The most common research method of acquiring data is through the use of interviews, as open-ended interviews provide the greatest opportunity for data to emerge that develops themes based upon responses (Creswell, 2003; Locke et al., 2004). For this study, interviews were utilized and are comprehensively explained in the Data Collection section.

Research Design

Selection of data sources. The data for this study were collected from the population described subsequently. These participants were selected via purposive sampling. Careful considerations were taken to protect the participants' rights as necessitated by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Population. The population consisted of mid-level leaders employed at a 4-year public or private higher education institution that worked specifically within the Division of Student Affairs. Patton (2002) posited that researchers define their sample from the population, "which is the group [in which] they are most interested" (p. 45). For the purpose of this study, mid-level leaders were defined as professional staff members in higher education whose administrative roles and functions support the goals and mission of the institution for which they work. These individuals interact frequently with students, faculty, staff, and the public. From this population, a sample of 15 participants from seven departments studied within the Division of Student Affairs were invited to participate in interviews. The criteria for the 15 mid-level leaders chosen for this study were that individuals had: (a) obtained at least a Master's degree with training and/or expertise in a related field that complimented their work within their individual department, (b) possessed a basic understanding of the principles and politics of higher education, and (c) currently held a mid-level leadership position for at least 2 years. All participants were of varied genders and ethnicities. There were no restrictions in regard to social status, health, family background, or affiliation of individuals within this population. "The qualitative researcher seeks participants because of their knowledge of and ability to describe the phenomenon or some part of the phenomenon under study"

(Donalek & Soldwisch, 2004, p. 356). Therefore, participants were chosen and interviewed for the study due to their ability to speak intelligently and credibly toward experiences and practices employed that have helped them successfully transition from entry-level to mid-level leadership roles in their higher education careers. Additionally, the participant selection was enhanced using a maximum variation strategy.

Sampling method. Within qualitative research, a sample is defined as a subgroup of a population selected by either probability or nonprobability methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An example of a probability sampling method includes simple random, systematic random, stratified, and multi-stage cluster samples. Conversely, an example of a nonprobability sample includes convenience sampling, snowball sampling, quota sampling, and theoretical sampling. The method of sampling for this study was purposive, utilizing a strategy of maximum variation. The following subsections discuss the sample size and guidelines.

Purposive sampling with maximum variation. A purposive sampling with maximum variation of individuals from various offices located within the division of student affairs was recruited within a nonprobabilistic sampling frame. This convenience sample included individuals employed within: University Housing, the Dean of Students' Office, the University President's Office, the Vice President for Student Affairs' Office, the Orientation Programs' Office, the Student Activities Office, and Health and Counseling Services. Gay and Airasian (2000) posited, "In purposive sampling…the researcher selects a sample based on his or her experience or knowledge of the group to be sampled" (p. 138). The benefit of purposive sampling is the depth of information that is gathered about issues essential to the purpose of the study from a small, yet knowledgeable sample (Isaac & Michael, 1995; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The researcher began by selecting varied characteristics for composing the sample (Isaac & Michael, 1995; McMillian & Schumacher, 2006). There was a need to include all opinions or views of experiences and practices employed that have helped professional mid-level staff successfully transition from entry-level to mid-level leadership roles at their current higher education institutions while also not being concerned with representing the views proportionally. As such, a heterogeneity sampling was utilized in order to gain a broad spectrum of ideas from a diverse range of participants (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). This practice also allowed for central themes to be determined of a particular population.

The criteria for inclusion was were that these individuals had: (a) obtained at least a Master's degree with training and/or expertise in a related field that complemented their work within their individual department, (b) possessed a basic understanding of the principals principles and politics of higher education, and (c) currently held a mid-level leadership position for at least 2 years. As most individuals in higher education are expected to receive at least a Master's Degree in Higher Education Administration or a comparable field, this inclusion requirement allowed the researcher to verify that individuals, based on their resume, had a basic understanding of the principles and politics of higher education. Additionally, these individuals possessed practical work experience in higher education that would also speak to them having knowledge of the higher education work environment. The criteria for exclusion were any factors that did not align with the stated criteria for inclusion.

The criteria for selecting the maximum variation in this study included: position title, industry (public or private), geographic location, age, ethnicity, educational achievement, marital status, and family background. These criteria were pulled from the literature review as factors that may possibly contribute to variances in lived experiences. Five steps were employed to arrive at the final list of individuals to utilize as participants of the study.

Step one. A public source in the form of a website named *Higheredjobs.com* was utilized for this study. This website lists every 2-year and 4-year higher education institution in the United States. Filtering options are available to pinpoint a specific interest for which an individual visiting the website may be searching.

Step two. Website filter options were utilized to reflect the inclusion criteria of the study. The population was initially narrowed down through selecting the *4-year institutions* filter option. Following this selection, the search was reduced further by choosing the filter option *administrative positions*.

Step three. From there, the population was condensed to positions that represent the areas of *student affairs and services*. Positions that fit the inclusion criteria were then reviewed by their individual position descriptions at their respective institutions to ensure that they continued to remain aligned with the inclusion criteria. This yielded an initial pool of 30 randomly selected roles from various higher education institutions.

Step four. Individual school websites were visited to further limit the candidate pool by assessing individuals based upon their available curriculum vitae (CV) or resume. The CV or resume of the candidate could be found directly on the school website or via a secondary personal link provided on the school website by the candidate. These documents spoke to the candidate's current and past roles and accomplishments as mid-level leaders in higher education.

Step five. During this research, based upon the information gathered, the initial pool of 30 potential participants was narrowed down to 15 higher education mid-level leaders in the division of student affairs, or comparable related area, that met the inclusion criteria and the definition of a mid-level leader. Upon these individuals being identified, the potential participants were contacted by utilizing the approved IRB recruitment script. These participants were contacted by utilizing the researcher's personal email address.

***Sample size*.** McMillian and Schumacher (2006) stated that "Qualitative inquirers view sampling processes as dynamic, ad hoc, and phasic rather than static or a priori parameters of populations" (p. 321). Additionally, there are no statistical rules in place to establish sample size, only standards for purposive sample size, for which samples can range from one to over 40 participants (McMillian & Schumacher, 2006; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, McMillian and Schumacher (2006) postulated:

> The logic of the sample size is related to the purpose, the research problem, the major data collection strategy, and the availability of information-rich cases. The insights generated from qualitative inquiry depend more on the information richness of the cases and the analytical capabilities of the individual than on the sample size. (p. 322)

Patton (2002) posited, "Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (p. 244). A small sample size is preferred for interviewing approaches (Isaac & Michael, 1995; Patton, 2002), which was employed as the method of choice for this study. The sample size in this study included 15 participants. Aligned with McMillian and Schumacher's (2006) thoughts, this sample size was presented to peer review in which the researcher's doctoral committee reviewed and approved the study's parameters.

Human subjects considerations. Approval from Pepperdine's Graduate and Professional School's IRB was secured before data collection. Participants were solicited for the interviews using a recruitment script, and consent was obtained from the chosen study participants via an electronic informed consent form. The form was provided to all potential participants who wished to take part in the study. Confidentiality was guaranteed to all individuals that participated, through reporting the data in the aggregate and using pseudonyms in place of proper names. The data were stored in a secure database, with access available only to the researcher. Anonymity could not be promised to individuals participating in the study. Nevertheless, their identities were not presented in the final draft of the dissertation. Rather, individual subjects were anonymous or were referred to as mid-level student affairs leaders. Individuals were made aware that there would be no risks to participation, as outlined in the communication that they received before participating in the interviews.

Although there was no extrinsic benefit to participation in this process, the intrinsic benefit that one may have achieved was being able to provide one's experiences to new research that would contribute to the field of leadership in higher education. Their thoughts and opinions can help individuals to become better in their current and/or future leadership roles (Taub & McEwen, 2006). There was no cause for deception, conflicts of interest, or copyright clearance and all data collection instruments were developed personally.

Data collection. Data were obtained from leaders within various higher education student affairs departments, including: University Housing, the Dean of Students Office, the Vice President for Student Affairs Office, the Orientation Programs Office, the Student Activities Office, and Health and Counseling Services. The method of data collection was in the form of in-depth interviews from those classified as mid-level leaders within their respective departments. Information gathered from different departments underneath the umbrella of student affairs provided a versatile array of responses, based on their individual area needs, but also allowed the opportunity to determine overlapping themes exhibited among all areas.

Data were collected from 4-year higher education institutions that followed either an academic quarter or semester system during the month of March 2016. The timeframe of data collection was cross-sectional in nature. The data collection focused on the implementation of leadership in regard to transitioning into a new mid-level leadership role from an entry-level position and what that looked like for an individual in a social stance Additionally, the data collection focused on an individual articulating and enforcing their vision as a new leader of an organization, and the role their followers would represent in interpreting that vision into results.

Grounded theory fit this study as it is mid-range specific focused on how a higher education professional transitions into a new mid-level leadership position from an entry-level role and what colleges and universities are doing to prepare staff for a successful transition into mid-level leadership roles. Phenomena measured were oriented toward recollections of the past, present experiences, and future aspirations or anticipations. Data were collected regarding a leader's actions in regard to goal-oriented movements to transition successfully into their new role in which they are able to clearly articulate their vision and leadership style into their new work environment, work to gain the trust and respect of their colleagues, and run an effective and efficient department. Using interviews as a means of data collection afforded the opportunity to identify additional issues to pursue in the research process based upon interviewees' responses.

Permission to conduct the study and contact the participants was obtained during the month of December 2015, via an application to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Approval to conduct research was anticipated during the month of February 2016. Upon receiving IRB approval for the study (See Appendix A), mid-level leaders of the specified student affairs departments were contacted via phone. They were provided explanation as to the nature and importance of the project and why they were specifically sought out for inclusion in the study. If the researcher was unable to get in contact with a mid-level leader, she left a voicemail and sent a follow-up email in regard to the voicemail, which included the reason for reaching out to the prospective interviewee. Prospective interviewees that consented to participate in the study received a follow-up email from thanking them for their time. Also included in the email was an explanation of the next steps in the process. These steps informed the participants that their full contact information would be requested and a personal interview would be scheduled for the month of March 2016.

Data were collected over a 1-month period during the winter quarter/spring semester of the 2015-2016 academic year within the month of March 2016. These data were collected in the form of a 13 question open-ended interview (see Appendix B). This interview was conducted in person by the researcher. The qualitative interview was estimated to last approximately 45-60 minutes, scheduled at the convenience of the participant and transcribed via written notes by the researcher. To ensure structured and timely completion of data gathering, 2 days before the interview, reminder emails were sent to interviewees reminding them of their scheduled date and time for the interview. Participants were provided an electronic copy of the interview questions in advance of the interview to allow them time to think through their responses along with an electronic copy of the informed consent form (See Appendix C). Reminder emails were sent weekly to those who may not have had a chance to respond to the initial interview invite (See Appendix D).

Interview Protocol

This section outlines the final interview protocol for the study. The protocol was evaluated by the preliminary review committee, and accepted and finalized by the dissertation committee. As the protocol was intended for a specific one-time usage, customary methods of determining reliability of a data collection instrument were not applicable.

Techniques. On the day of the in-person interview the researcher arrived to the participant's meeting venue approximately 15 minutes before the start of the interview. Supplies for the interview consisted of two audio recorders, a writing pad, and three black pens. Upon sitting down with the interviewee, opening questions were asked to develop rapport with the interviewee. The participants were asked about how their day was going and if he or she had any questions before the formal interview process began. Once there were no further questions that needed to be answered, the participant was asked if they read, understood, and agreed to the informed consent form received via email. Upon the participant indicating that they did read the consent form and accepted the terms, it was understood that the participant recognized the risks and/or benefits that he or she may have experienced as a result of being a participant of the study. The electronic consent forms were secured by printing and placing them in a locked cabinet, to which no outside individual was allowed access, in order to maintain participants' confidentiality.

Instructions provided to participants regarding their completion of the open-ended interview emphasized that they take their time during the interview and honestly contribute their thoughts and opinions to the particular questions asked. The participants were informed that the interview was semi-structured and that there may be a possibility of follow-up questions asked intended to gain additional clarity and depth in their responses. It was emphasized that there was no time limit for completion of the interview, although it was estimated that it would take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. The participants were informed that this was a qualitative study and that their responses were to be used as data for a doctoral dissertation focusing on leadership development for mid-level leaders in higher education institutions. Additionally, this information would help educate future mid-level leaders transition successfully from an entry-level role into a mid-level leadership role within a student affairs department.

During the interview, techniques such as paraphrasing and summarization were utilized for clarification upon receiving responses to each question posed to the interviewee (Evans, 2009). Active listening was also employed, in which the researcher remained quiet as the participant answered questions and did not add any follow-up commentary to statements that may have sparked a particular interest. Responses were limited to brief answers such as “I see,” “Interesting,” or a head nod acknowledging that the researcher understood what the participant was saying. Upon concluding the interview, the participant was thanked for his/her time, and he/she was informed of the next steps in the process, in which the participant would receive a copy of their interview responses to review for accuracy. Additionally, the participants were asked if he/she could be contacted for questions of clarity, if needed. A member check was completed at the conclusion of the study. One week after the interview was conducted the participants were provided a copy of the transcribed notes for the participant to review. This allowed the participant to correct, clarify, and verify the information he or she provided during their interview.

Instrumentation. Data were collected from participants over the span of a 1-month period in the form of one qualitative instrument. The data-gathering instrument was a set of 13 open-ended interview questions that helped answer the dissertation research questions. The data collection instrument was created independently as opposed to utilizing a previously created instrument, as the questions that needed to be addressed in the data gathering process were very specific to higher education institutions and entry to mid-level leadership transitions. The responses gathered helped identify characteristics professional staff in higher education institutions must possess in order to successfully transition into new mid-level management and leadership roles, and how their institutions can contribute to their successful transition. The exact questions that needed to be utilized for this research had not yet been created.

The interview instrument was developed and refined based upon feedback from a preliminary review panel and the dissertation committee. This feedback will be expounded upon further in the Validity of the Interview Protocol section. Data collection focused on the implementation of leadership in regard to entry-level professionals effectively transitioning into a new mid-level leadership role (See Table 1).

Table 1

Relationships among the Variable, Data Sources, and Respondents

Variable	Data Sources	Respondents
Current Mid-level leader that has experienced transitioning into a mid-level leadership role	Thirteen open-ended interview questions	Mid-Level Leaders

Note. This table shows the relationship of the variable to the data sources from which the variable was studied. It lists the particular group that participated in taking the quantitative survey, which are the mid-level leaders.

Validity and reliability. Validity of the instrument was assessed to ensure that the questions on the protocol sufficiently addressed the paradigms in the research questions. To determine validity, a three-step process was employed: (a) prima facie validity, (b) peer review validity, and (c) expert review. Following is an explanation of each step used in the validation process.

Step one: Prima facie validity. Based on a review of the literature, the researcher initially designed what she believed to be 12 appropriate interview questions that matched each research question. These interview questions were assumed to yield versatile and rich responses to answer their respective research questions (Shulman, Shedletsky, & Silver, 1986).

Step two: Peer review validity. In order to challenge any assumptions and ask difficult questions about methods and interpretations, a peer review process was employed to further establish validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A table was constructed that showed the relationship between each research question and the corresponding interview questions (See Table 2).

Table 2

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges do higher education institutions face in preparing staff for mid-level management and leadership roles?	*Interview Question 1*: What have been some important challenges (spoken or unspoken) you have run into as a mid-level leader in higher education? *Interview Question 2*: How did you become aware of or experienced these challenges? *Interview Question 3*: What parts of your transition into mid-level management were more difficult (e.g., first month, 60 days, etc.)? *Interview Question 4*: To what extent did these challenges impact your career path?
RQ2: What can higher education institutions do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles?	*Interview Question 5*: How could your institution have better prepared you for the challenges you described earlier? *Interview Question 6*: What in your own previous training and preparation assisted you in overcoming these challenges? *Interview Question 7*: What resources are or can be made available by your institution to better prepare you for a more successful transition into a mid-level leader role? *Interview Question 8*: What positive leadership techniques and methods have worked in defining your mid-level position and leadership style in the department you lead? Follow up: Mentoring, shadowing, coaching, more education, etc.

(continued)

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ3: How do higher education institutions measure their success in preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles?	*Interview Question 9*: How would you personally describe the elements of a successful transition to mid-level management? *Interview Question 10*: How could these elements be measured and tracked by the institution to ensure a successful transition to mid-level management? *Interview Question 11*: As a mid-level leader, what methods did YOU employ to benchmark and track your own progress and success as you prepared for and transitioned into your new position?
RQ4: What recommendations do higher education institutions make for creating successful career advancement programs?	*Interview Question 12*: What advice or cautionary measures would you give to those aspiring to mid-level leadership positions? *Interview Question 13*: Is there anything else you wish to add?

Note. This table shows the interview questions proposed to answer the study's research questions. These questions were presented to two panels of reviewers to evaluate and provide feedback on the applicability of each interview question in regard to answering the study's research questions.

The table was then evaluated by a preliminary panel of reviewers composed of two researchers with business industry expertise who were enrolled in the Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University. These students were similarly conducting and employing a comparable research methodology within their own doctoral dissertations and have all concluded a series of doctoral-level courses in quantitative and qualitative research methods and data analysis. The panel was given a package that included: a summary statement of this research paper, a copy of the research question and corresponding interview questions table (Table 2), and directives to follow to assess if the interview questions were appropriately aligned with the research questions.

The directives provided to the panel were as follows:

1. Please review the summary statement attached to acquaint yourself with the purpose and goals of this study.
2. Next, assess the corresponding interview questions.
3. If you conclude that the interview question is applicable to the corresponding, mark “The question is applicable to the research question - Keep as stated.”
4. If you conclude that the interview question is not applicable to the corresponding interview question mark, “ This question is not applicable to the research question - delete it.”
5. Finally, if you conclude that to be applicable to the research question, the interview question must be amended, mark “The question should be amended as suggested.” and in the available space provided recommend your amendment.
6. An additional space was also provided to recommend additional interview questions for each research question.

Suggestions for revisions primarily focused on the specificity of the proposed interview questions. This specificity edit was suggested by the preliminary review panel in an effort to have the interviewee better understand exactly what was being asked by of the interview participants. As a result, the specific and clear questions would allow the interviewee to provide concise and relevant responses based upon the questions posed.

Step three: Expert review. The results of the work of the preliminary review panel were then presented to the dissertation review committee. All three experts brought to this study a wide range of experiences as researchers and subject matter experts on current excellence practices in the realm of higher education and organizational leadership. Their collective knowledge helped to analyze all of the important aspects of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Revisions suggested were as follows. For all research questions, the dissertation committee suggested to make sure that the corresponding interview questions listed in the table reflected the exact language that would be used when interviewing the subject. Additionally, it was also recommended to ensure that there was enough specificity within each question so that the participant understood exactly what was being asked while also not being guided toward an answer. As such, it was suggested to re-word all of the questions so they were personally directed toward the subject. This modification allowed the subject to feel as though he or she was answering personally, rather than being presented with vague interview language that inadvertently asked the subject to provide a theoretical answer, with no emotional or practical context behind it. The summary of changes were as follows:

- Interview Question (IQ) 1 initially assigned to Research Question (RQ) 1 was moved to represent RQ2.
- IQ2 initially assigned to RQ1 was moved to represent RQ4.
- Both questions were respectively assigned to alternate research questions proposed as the committee felt what was being asked from the two interview questions in particular were more aligned with their newly assigned research questions.

- One additional question was proposed and added (IQ13). Is there anything else you wish to add? This question allowed the participant to include any additional information that may not have been addressed based on the interview questions but was relevant to the findings of the study. It also allowed any additional themes to emerge from information shared, which would add to the results of the study.

Validity and reliability of the study. Verification of data is the practice of checking, re-checking, checking, and checking again (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2008). In qualitative research, verification highlights the procedures employed during the process of research to contribute to confirming reliability and validity and, as a result, the rigor of a study. These procedures are amalgamated into every step of the analysis to produce a credible product by recognizing and modifying errors before they are incorporated into the final product and before they undergo further evaluation (Creswell, 1997; Kvale, 1989). Patton (2002) posited that validity and reliability are two factors of which all qualitative researchers should be aware while designing a study, evaluating results, and judging the quality of the study. Lacking rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility, which is why importance is allocated strongly to reliability and validity in all research methods (Morse et al., 2008). Guba and Lincoln (1981) replaced validity and reliability with the concept of trustworthiness, which encompasses contains four factors: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

***Credibility**.* Credibility is seen as confidence in the truth of the findings. Its criterion involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participants. Since, from this perspective, the purpose of qualitative research is to describe or understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants' eyes, the participants are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Transferability. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. The qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. The person who wishes to transfer the results to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Dependability. Dependability emphasizes the need to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. This criteria demonstrates that findings are constant and can be repeated. The researcher is responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the study was approached (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

Confirmability. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. There are a number of strategies for enhancing confirmability. The researcher can document the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Another researcher can take a *devil's advocate* role with respect to the results, and this process can be documented. The researcher can actively search for and describe any *negative instances* that contradict prior observations. Moreover, after the study, one can conduct a *data audit* that examines the data collection and analysis procedures and makes judgments about the potential for bias or distortion (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

***Discussion*.** These four factors contain specific methodological approaches for displaying qualitative rigor, including: audit trails; member checks when coding, categorizing, or confirming results with participants; peer debriefing; negative case analysis; structural corroboration; and referential material adequacy (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Also significant are skills of the investigator, who must: be receptive and flexible to varying circumstances, be well rounded, possess processional immediacy, be compassionate, and possess the capability for explanation and summarization (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Utilizing the independent procedures of verification and validity together provides a useful structure for assessing the quality of research conclusions. Validity is universal in scope and applicability, while rooted in its philosophical principles. This makes it an invaluable concept to understand and incorporate into a qualitative research project.

Validity. Creswell and Miller (2000) posited that validity is altered by the researcher's opinion of the study and his or her choice of standard assumption. As a result, many researchers have formulated their own notions of validity and have often fashioned or espoused what they consider to be more fitting terms, such as quality, rigor, and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 2000; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). Regardless of the name used for the concept, validity, similarly known by the terms trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility, is seen as "a strength of qualitative research" (Creswell, 2003, p. 195). As such, the following strategies were employed in this study and are recommended for assuring the validity of qualitative research:

1. Triangulate data from different sources.
2. Use member-checking to determine the accuracy of the data.
3. Use rich, thick description to convey the findings and give the discussion an element of shared experiences.
4. Clarify any bias brought to the study.
5. Present negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes.
6. Use peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account.
7. Use an external auditor to review the entire project. (Creswell, 2003)

Data were triangulated from different sources by conducting a literature review on the subject, participating in casual conversation with higher education colleagues in the field in regard to the topic, and holding structured in-depth interviews with 15 mid-level leaders in higher education that fit the population best equipped to answer the interview questions posed. Member-checking was employed to determine the accuracy of the data by giving the interview participants a copy of the transcribed notes of their respective interviews, which allowed them to review and consent to the data being gathered. Rich, thick description was employed to confer the findings and give the discussion an element of shared experiences by incorporating in noteworthy quotes from the interviewees that support the individual key themes emerging from the data to add to the validity of the findings. Bias was clarified by providing a narrative of self-reflection that can be found in the section titled Statement of Researcher Bias. Negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes can be found in Chapter IV to add credibility to the results for the reader. Lastly, help was enlisted of several individuals to read and serve as external auditors, assessing the study at various stages of research.

Reliability. To warrant reliability in qualitative research, analysis of trustworthiness is crucial (Morse et al., 2008). Reliability is concerned with the “consistency, stability, and repeatability of the informant’s accounts as well as the investigators’ ability to collect and record information accurately” (Seltiz, Wrightsman, & Cook, 1976, p. 182). Reliability in qualitative research derives from the need for clarification of two factors: (a) the origin of data in which participants statements are distinguished from the researcher’s preconceptions and (b) practices in the field and in managing the text while formulating the data gathering and data analysis process (Flick, 2002). Reliability requires that a researcher utilize comparable methods in assessment and those methods produce similar results repeatedly. Additionally, it requires that dependable responses are established in using the technique, recording, or evaluating of its results, and that considerations related to participants and assessment procedures have been managed to minimize measurement error (Brink, 1993).

Statement of Researcher Bias

This project was pursued based upon personal experiences of witnessing colleagues transition from entry to mid-level leadership positions in higher education with little to no support to be successful in their role, as well as personally experiencing this transitional period into a new mid-level leadership position. The problem of lack of proper support and preparation for a leader transitioning into a new mid-level leadership role from an entry-level position in higher education was of interest as a problem that could be solved. Personal experiences of the researcher in this area shaped her perspective in regard to:

- What types of support can be provided to this population of professionals;
- the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed solution; and
- the vision of how the successful implementation of this research could redesign the development of successful mid-level higher education leaders and institutions in the future.

Creswell and Miller (2000) posited that any personal biases should always be highlighted in a research project. This allows the reader to recognize the researcher's views, and then "bracket or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Bracketing is defined as a technique utilized to alleviate the potential adverse outcomes of unrecognized notions connected to the research that, as a result, will increase the rigor of the project (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Additionally, bracketing is also a technique employed to shield an individual from the collective effects of studying what may be psychologically challenging material.

While bracketing can alleviate unfavorable effects of the research project, it also helps achieve richer levels of reflection through all phases of qualitative research (Tufford & Newman, 2012). This includes "selecting a topic and population, designing the interview, collecting and interpreting data, and reporting findings" (Tufford & Newman, 2012, p. 81). Transparency about the employment of bracketing should be incorporated into the writing phase of the research process, in which there is a discussion regarding the approach and influence of bracketing to the research project. Methods of bracketing can take place in various ways:

1. Writing memos throughout data collection and analysis as a technique of exploring immersion with the data (Cutcliffe, 2003).
2. Engaging in interviews with an external source to reveal and highlight predispositions (Rolls & Relf, 2006).
3. Writing in reflexive journal before defining the research question, in which biases are then recognized during the research development (Ahern, 1999).

Memos can manifest in the form of conjectural notes that explain the reasoning for conducting research, organizational notes that explain the technical elements of the research, and observational statements that permit one to examine feelings about the research project (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Bracketing interviews can expand one's understanding and interactions with participants' experiences by determining underrated personal experiences. Additionally, it can also protect researchers and participants within psychologically charged research topics while increasing the one's understanding of the phenomenon to be studied (Rolls & Relf, 2006).

Maintaining a journal enhances the capacity to maintain a reflexive stance. Factors to explore in the reflexive journal include, but are not limited to the following: (a) an individual's rationale for pursuing the research; (b) postulations concerning gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status; and (c) one's ethical framework (Hanson, 1994; Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Bracketing techniques employed within this study included writing memos throughout the data collection process and engaging in interviews with an outside source. These techniques were highlighted in the interview protocol section and are further expanded upon in the data analysis section.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed and transcribed by utilizing memos, data entry and storage, and coding. Memos were written when ideas or insights emerged from personal observations of the study subjects as well as from interview responses that may have led to a follow-up question. Data gathered from the interview process, memos, and observational notes were transcribed into a word processing document. The transcribed data were then segmented into codes.

Inter-rater reliability/validity. To establish inter-rater reliability and increase the external validity of the results, a three-step process was utilized to review the results of the coding process.

1. The researcher coded the data.
2. The researcher discussed the results with two peer reviewers with the goal of arriving at a consensus regarding the coding results.
3. An expert review was conducted if there was no consensus.

Coding by the researcher. An inductive coding procedure was employed that involved interim analysis, coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations for the problem of significance. The inductive approach is apparent in numerous forms of qualitative data analyses, especially grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There are three reasons for utilizing an inductive approach:,

- To condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format.

- To establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data.
- To develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the raw data. (Thomas, 2003, p. 5)

Thomas (2003) delineated the following procedures necessary for inductive analysis of qualitative data:

1. *Preparation of raw data files (“data cleaning”)*: Format the raw data files in a common format (e.g., font size, margins, questions or interviewer comments highlighted) if required. Print and/or make a backup of each raw data file (e.g., each interview).
2. *Close reading of text*: Once text has been prepared, the raw text should be read in detail so that one is familiar with the content and gains an understanding of the *themes* and details in the text.
3. *Creation of categories*: The researcher identifies and defines categories or themes. The upper level or more general categories are likely to be derived from the research aims. The lower level or specific categories will be derived from multiple readings of the raw data (in vivo coding). For *in vivo* coding, categories are created from meaning units or actual phrases used in specific text segments. Several procedures for creating categories may be used. Copy and paste (e.g., using a word processor) marked text segments into each category. Specialist software (e.g., NUD*IST, Ethnograph) can be used to speed up the coding process where there are large amounts of text data.

4. *Overlapping coding and uncoded text*: Among the commonly assumed rules that underlie qualitative coding, two are different from the rules typically used in quantitative coding: (a) one segment of text may be coded into more than one category. (b) a considerable amount of the text may not be assigned to any category, as much of the text may not be relevant to the research objectives.
5. *Continuing revision and refinement of category system*: Within each category, search for subtopics, including contradictory points of view and new insights. Select appropriate quotes that convey the core theme or essence of a category. The categories may be combined or linked under a superordinate category when the meanings are similar. (Thomas, 2003, p. 5)

From this study's inductive analysis, several patterns and themes emerged from the interviewees' responses. During the coding process, a master list was kept of all the codes that were developed and used in the study. This information helped develop an answer to the research questions posed for this study. Additionally, the coding process was utilized to create categories within the inductive analysis process. Thomas (2003) described five key features of categories that typically develop as a result of coding:

1. *Label for category*: Word or short phrase used to refer to category. The label often carries inherent meanings that may not reflect the specific features of the category.
2. *Description of category*: Description of the meaning of category including key characteristics, scope and limitations.

3. *Text or data associated with category*: Examples of text coded into category that illustrate meanings, associations, and perspectives associated with the category.
4. *Links:* Each category may have links or relationships with other categories. In a hierarchical category system (e.g., tree diagram), these links may indicate superordinate, parallel and subordinate categories (e.g., parent, sibling or child relationships). Links are likely to be based on commonalities in meanings between categories or assumed causal relationships.
5. *Type of model in which category is embedded:* The category system may be incorporated in a model, theory, or framework. Such frameworks include; an open network (no hierarchy or sequence), a temporal sequence (e.g., movement or time), or a causal network (one category causes changes in another). It is also possible that a category will not be embedded in any model or framework. (Thomas, 2003, p. 4)

The researcher utilized the categories of: label, description, text, and links to connect to the proposed research questions. This process resulted in the initial coding results that were then presented to a panel of peers and experts to review. Following is an explanation of the review process.

Peer review and expert review process. After the initial coding, a co-reviewer process was employed. A panel of two co-reviewers individually assessed the researcher’s coding. These reviewers were doctoral candidates in the Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University. They had previously taken two doctoral courses in qualitative methods and data analysis and had engaged in dissertation work that utilized a similar coding procedure. The coding strategy and the resulting master categories were presented to the evaluators for verification. The coding results were maintained when both evaluators and the researcher agreed on their validity.

Upon completion of this assessment, the co-reviewers then discussed the themes and key phrases and recommended changes and modifications as needed. When the group discussion did not yield a unanimous agreement, the disputed points were presented to the chair of the dissertation committee for final review and resolution. Based upon the data analyzed, the findings were presented in the impending chapters of the dissertation by referring to the key themes that emerged from the coding, their descriptions, and sample participant quotes in Chapter IV.

Summary of Chapter III

Chapter III began with an introduction of the chapter and its components related to the research design and methodology of the study. The research questions were restated, followed by a discussion highlighting qualitative research and why it was chosen as the method of evaluation for this problem. The chapter went on to discuss the use of phenomenology in the study as the examination of an individual's personal recollections of experiences that he/she has encountered. The population was defined as mid-level leaders employed at a 4-year, public or private, higher education institution that worked specifically within the Division of Student Affairs. The inclusion criteria were that these individuals: (a) had obtained at least a Master's degree with training and/or expertise in a related field that complimented their work within their individual department, and (b) possessed a basic understanding of the principles and politics of higher education. The method of purposive sampling of individuals within a nonprobabilistic sampling frame was explained. Human subjects consideration was taken into account, including a review by the IRB.

Data collection in the form of a structured in-depth interview was reviewed, including an overview of the interview protocol and the creation of the data collection instrument used for the study. Validity and reliability were discussed, including an explanation of the function a panel of three experts served to provide constructive, honest feedback and suggestions regarding the 13 interview questions created by the researcher. Afterwards, a statement of researcher bias was provided. The data analysis process was discussed, in which the researcher spoke to the utilization of memos, data entry and storage, and coding. The chapter concluded with a look at the data, which is expanded upon as the research findings in Chapter IV.

Chapter IV: Findings

As mid-level leadership is critical in higher education (Flanders, 2008), it is important to ensure that individuals that hold these roles are equipped to deal with the complexities and responsibilities that come with their respective positions. This includes supervision of employees below them, leading and managing an efficient and effective department, and navigating institutional politics, for example. Contrary to entry-level individuals in student affairs that frequently receive substantial training at the start of their new roles, and senior-level leaders who are seasoned in the field, mid-level leaders rarely receive comprehensive trainings and/or preparation to be successful in one's role from their institution. As such, the purpose of this study was to determine what higher education institutions could do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles. For this study, there are four research questions to be addressed. They are as follows:

1. What challenges do higher education institutions face in preparing staff for mid-level management and leadership roles?
2. What can higher education institutions do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles?
3. How do higher education institutions measure their success in preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles?
4. What recommendations do higher education institutions make for creating successful career advancement programs?

In order to answer these four research questions, 13 interview questions were created and then presented to a panel of two inter-raters and three experts for validation. Once approved, these questions were then used to interview the participants of this study. Following are the interview questions:

1. What have been some important challenges (spoken or unspoken) you have run into as a mid-level leader in higher education?
2. How did you become aware of or experienced these challenges?
3. What parts of your transition into mid-level management were more difficult (e.g., first month, 60 days, etc.)?
4. To what extent did these challenges impact your career path?
5. How could your institution have better prepared you for the challenges you described earlier?
6. What in your own previous training and preparation assisted you in overcoming these challenges?
7. What resources are or can be made available by your institution to better prepare you for a more successful transition into a mid-level leader role?
8. What positive leadership techniques and methods have worked in defining your mid-level position and leadership style in the department you lead? *Follow up*: Mentoring, shadowing, coaching, more education, etc.
9. How would you personally describe the elements of a successful transition to mid-level management?
10. How could these elements be measured and tracked by the institution to ensure a successful transition to mid-level management?

11. As a mid-level leader, what methods did YOU employ to benchmark and track your own progress and success as you prepared for and transitioned into your new position?
12. What advice or cautionary measures would you give to those aspiring to mid-level leadership positions?
13. Is there anything else you wish to add?

The participants interviewed for this study provided open and personal accounts of their experiences transitioning from entry-level positions into their current mid-level leadership roles in higher education. Information that emerged from these discussions will serve as advantageous tips and guidelines to consider when planning for a successful transition into an institution as a current or aspiring mid-level leader. This chapter presents the results of the study, including a participant profile, and discussion of the data collection. Additionally, data obtained from the 13 semi-structured interview questions have been analyzed and will be presented subsequently.

Participants

Fifteen participants were interviewed for this study. Of these 15 participants, nine identified as women (60%) and six identified as men (40%). The study participants were all mid-level leaders in higher education, specifically within the area of student affairs. The 15 participants came from various higher education institutions. Twelve participants came from public institutions (80%) and three came from private institutions (20%). Confidentiality was promised to all participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected from 15 mid-level leaders in higher education in the area of student affairs. Names of mid-level leaders in higher education were researched by first identifying institutions via Higheredjobs.com, a publically-accessible website, that fit the initial institutional requirement of being a 4-year public or private institution within the United States. Next, specific mid-level leaders were then identified via their individual school websites who had readily identifiable information speaking to their background in higher education, such as a resume or CV to assess their candidacy. For those who did not have this information on their institutional website, the researcher then utilized another online resource, Linkedin.com, a publically accessible website for professionals in various industries that frequently upload their resumes/CVs for public viewing. Once the 15 candidates were identified their school email address was obtained from their publically accessible institutional website. Upon receiving IRB approval from Pepperdine University in February 2016, these 15 individuals were contacted via email utilizing the approved IRB invitation recruitment script. These invitations were sent to their professional email addresses on file as indicated on their school website.

Ten of the participants invited to be interviewed responded to the initial invitation within 2 calendar days confirming their participation. Three interview participants confirmed within 5 calendar days. The final two participants confirmed within 7 calendar days after a reminder invitation (See Appendix E) was sent to them via their school email address.

Data collection was conducted utilizing 13 interview questions. The data collection process consisting of 15 interviews was completed in 2 weeks. A 16th participant had agreed to participate but due to the timeline for project completion, the individual was unable to be accommodated for the study. Notes were taken during all 15 interviews in addition to being audio recorded.

All interviews were conducted in one sitting between the hours of 8:00am-7:00pm. Two interviews had to be re-scheduled to a different date and time due to interviewee scheduling conflicts. Although a 45-60 minute time slot was allotted, one interview took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The shortest interview took 32 minutes and the longest interview took 55 minutes. Table 3 presents the days on which each participant interview was conducted. The researcher conducted the initial transcriptions of the audio recordings. Transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy against the audio recording and then sent to each interview participant to confirm or edit as well over the course of 1 calendar week. All interview participants confirmed accuracy of their audio transcriptions by replying to the initial email message that contained the transcription for the participant to review.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves interim analysis, memoing, data entry and storage, and coding (Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). In particular, the data analysis utilized for this study consisted of data entry and storage, and coding and developing category systems to interpret the data. By employing this data analysis process, themes emerged to answer the four research questions. Additionally, the data analysis process involved data reduction and data display.

Table 3

Dates of Participant Interviews

Participant	Interview date
P1	March 2, 2016
P2	March 4, 2016
P3	March 7, 2016
P4	March 7, 2016
P5	March 7, 2016
P6	March 7, 2016
P7	March 10, 2016
P8	March 11, 2016
P9	March 13, 2016
P10	March 14, 2016
P11	March 16, 2016
P12	March 16, 2016
P13	March 17, 2016
P14	March 18, 2016
P15	March 18, 2016

Miles and Huberman (1994) described the data reduction process as “a form of analysis that sharpens, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that conclusions can be drawn and verified” (pp. 10-11). With this in mind, the first step in analyzing the data was to become familiar with the information that the interview participants shared. This step was accomplished by manually transcribing the audio-recorded data into a written format in a Microsoft Word document. In transcribing the data, the researcher listened to the audio recordings three times each. During the first review of each recording, the researcher listened to the recordings straight through and typed as much as she could from what she heard. Recognizing that there may have been some words or phrases missed in the first listening session, to be authentic to the recording, the researcher listened to the recording for a second time, reading along with the transcribed notes to complete any statements or words that may have been missed during the first audio review. Lastly, to check for accuracy of all text transcribed from the recordings, the researcher listened to each recording for a third and final time, reading along with the most recently transcribed notes for any final edits. The transcribed interviews were then sent to the respective interview participants who were given a 7-day (1 week) deadline to confirm the accuracy of the transcription. All interview participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcription and the researcher was then able to begin the coding process to determine themes from the data.

The researcher read each transcript line-by-line three times. During this process, as key statements of words were explicitly stated from the transcribed text, the comment option in a Microsoft Word document was utilized to highlight the term or phrase that stood out for easy categorization later in the coding process. If a participant made a statement that didn't result in direct key words, the researcher inferred what the interview participant stated and determined a key word or phrase that summed up their statement (Creswell, 1998). This process was repeated for the remainder of the first transcribed document and the 14 transcribed documents to follow.

Upon the data being transcribed, the following analysis process took place:

- The verbatim transcript was read three times to establish familiarity.
- Unstructured coding of the data took place to determine the varying meanings to develop from the data.
- Main issues, concepts, and themes were deduced and matched with literature in order to determine a thematic context.
- Upon the codes being created, common themes were acknowledged.

- Any significant statements as highlighted during the reading process were taken from the transcripts.
- A table was created via Microsoft Excel in order to group all related themes as they formed.
- The data were then sorted by frequency.
- All emerging and related themes were grouped.
- Upon the data being assessed, each singular occurring statement was listed and noted.
- The themes were amalgamated into a descriptive account of what was experienced utilizing the verbatim transcripts for reference and support.
- The coding table was then given to two inter-raters, as discussed in detail in Chapter III, who each reviewed the coding document, individually providing feedback on the current coding categories and providing suggestions for additional categories or edits to the initial researcher coding. This process will be discussed further in the next section.
- Finally, key characteristics were created from the data to decipher it as a whole.
- In the final output, the data were presented utilizing narrative and a variety of figures in the form of bar graphs to present a visual picture of the findings.

Inter-rater Review Process

The coding table was given to two doctoral candidates in Pepperdine's University Organizational Leadership program who served as the inter-raters for this study. Both doctoral students were currently enrolled within the Doctorate of Education in

Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University during the time of this study. These individuals were chosen because they possessed experience conducting similar research methodology within their dissertations and had taken a series of doctoral-level courses in quantitative and qualitative research methods and data analysis. There was no identifiable information regarding the interview participants within the coding table. The inter-raters reviewed the data independently by first reviewing the initial coding suggestions, and then providing their own suggestions for editing of the table. In addition, from their analysis of the coding table they provided additional suggestions for categories to include. There were few edits and differences between the coders, but when questions or concerns arose, a discussion was held until an agreement was reached. Debates referenced the context of the source material to answer concerns raised. In particular, the inter-rater reviewers asked suggested moving a few coding data points under different categories that more clearly reflected their message. For example, for interview question nine (IQ9) there were two categories: (a) taking initiative, and (b) knowing your job.

Initially two characteristics were listed under *taking initiative*: staying up-to-date on professional development opportunities, and knowing that you are responsible for your transition. An inter-rater reviewer suggested that these two characteristics would fit better under the category of *knowing your job* versus *taking initiative*, so they were moved to accommodate the suggestion (See Table 4).

Table 4

Inter-rater Coding Table Edit Recommendations

Interview Question	Items	Move From	Move To
1	Feeling equipped enough to provide that next development and knowledge for those I supervise and also feeling equipped to understand where I am and where I'm going	Being a supervisor and a colleague (10)	Lack of Communication (6) (It goes with No training)
7	All items under Mentorship		Could fall under professional development (as one of the steps in professionally developing employees).
9	Staying up to date on professional development opportunities	Taking initiative (6)	Knowing your job (6)
	Knowing that you are responsible for your transition	Taking initiative (6)	Knowing your job (6)

Note. This table demonstrates the suggestions provided by the inter-rater reviewers regarding the initial coding table provided by the researcher.

The 15 hours of interview recordings yielded 90 pages of transcripts; the coded excerpts yielded 280 pages. From the coded excerpts, themes were determined for each research question. A matrix was compiled that demonstrated the number of different interview participants who cited them. Themes were indicated as substantial if at least two or more interview participants identified them as important.

Data Display

Data were organized by research question. Frequency charts and transcript excerpts were utilized to highlight the assorted themes that emerged from the interviews. As confidentiality was assured to the interview subjects, labels were utilized corresponding to their interview order (e.g. Participant 1 [P1], Participant 2 [P2], etc.). Themes were formed based on explicit language utilized in the subjects' responses to the interview questions. In times when no key action words were explicitly stated in a response, the researcher inferred and summarized the message the subject was trying to convey in his/her response into key thematic words. With the addition of frequency charts, each of the research questions was substantiated through participant quotes found in the transcribed data. It is important to note that throughout the following pages, to preserve the candidness of responses from interview participants of the study, statement excerpts are reported verbatim. These quotes may contain incomplete sentences or idioms. Nevertheless, in the context of the semi-structured interviews held, they distinctly communicated the participants' intent.

Research Question One

Research question one asked, What challenges do higher education institutions face in preparing staff for mid-level management and leadership roles? In order to answer this question, four interview questions were posed:

1. What have been some important challenges (spoken or unspoken) you have run into as a mid-level leader in higher education?
2. How did you become aware of or experienced these challenges?
3. What parts of your transition into mid-level management were more difficult (e.g., first month, 60 days, etc.)?
4. To what extent did these challenges impact your career path?

Specific themes emerged from each of the four interview questions that would then form the overall key themes to answer research question one.

Interview Question 1: What have been some important challenges (spoken or unspoken) you have run into as a mid-level leader in higher education? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 39 characteristics developed. From those 39 characteristics, the following seven themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) behind the scenes experiences; (b) being a supervisor and a colleague; (c) culture; (d) job expectations; (e) lack of communication; (f) managing people at different skill levels; and (g) politics (See Figure 1).

Being a supervisor and a colleague. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question with 11 instances (28%) of it being mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. In regard to research question one, an institution carefully choosing language to effectively communicate this theme to new mid-level leaders will be imperative when helping these individuals start off successfully in their new role. For example, P1 mentioned isolation as one moves up in the field:

> The higher you move up in an institution the more isolating it is and I think there is a lot of truth to that. There is a lot of information that you become privy to that you would like to share, but it wouldn't be to the benefit of the institution to share that information. Yet, you think to yourself 'that information would give people so much perspective' but it might make someone look bad or not be the way the institution may want to portray themselves or whatever the case may be. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

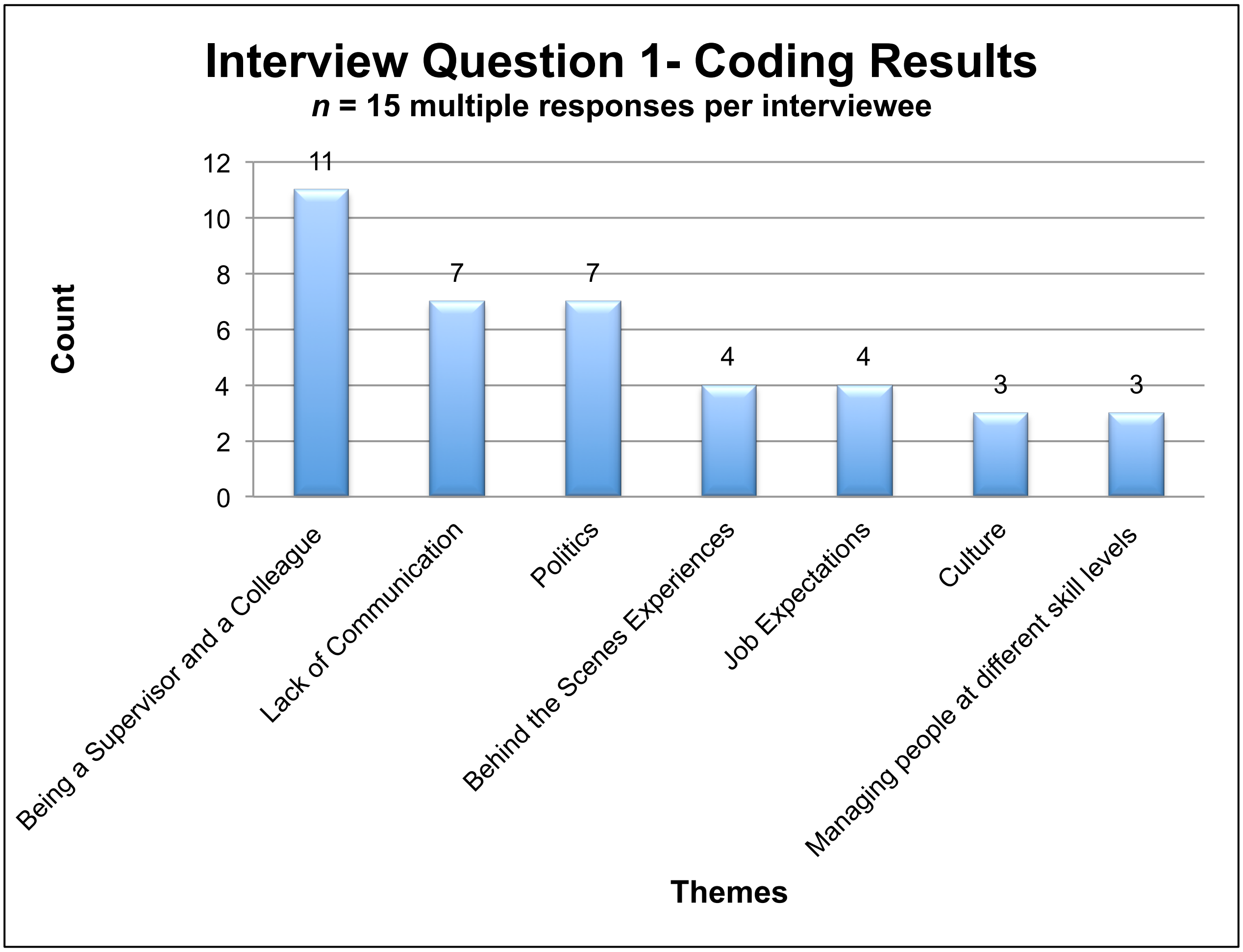

Figure 1. Important challenges experienced as a mid-level leader in higher education. This figure demonstrates the seven themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers below each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

In terms of supervising, P10 mentioned finding the balance between being a friend and a supervisor as a challenge. When interacting with staff, one needs to "be seen on a professional level and not just [as] a friend" (P10, personal communication, March 14, 2016). Additionally, being able to get along with others is important. P1 stated that "the most successful mid-level managers get along with their peers. They can collaborate and they can benefit from other people's work, and have people benefit from theirs" (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016).

Supervising professional staff or even being supervised by a professional staff member that one used to supervise can be challenging for a mid-level professional, as mentioned by P4 and P10. In regard to research question one, institutions highlighting this supervisory scenario as a possibility will allow mid-level leaders to be proactive in considering how they would think through and approach this situation and/or be ready for the possibility of this situation happening within their careers. P4 illustrated this point by stating, "I think the staff is always a challenge. When I got to mid-level the entry-level staff were the hardest thing for me especially when it comes to supervising them and meeting their expectations" (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016). P10 further contributed, "One of the challenges I've had is having someone who I previously supervised become one of my supervisors" (P10, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

Furthermore, finding one's voice and knowing when to challenge and when to follow can be difficult, as when one enters into the role of mid-level leader, one may believe that one always has to be the person to lead and make decisions. Additionally, if a new mid-level leader is on a team of multiple mid-level leaders with strong personalities, P10 noted that just learning how to speak up and challenge is an issue along with "knowing when to follow and when to challenge with those who are my peers and how to move through challenge afterwards" (P10, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

P5 had a different take on supervision, focusing on the intentional or unintentional overworking of entry-level staff and having to manage that as a mid-level leader. P5 stated:

> We are encouraged to directly work and exploit entry-level employees by getting the absolute most out of them for a limited duration and them moving on to someone else. That is something I don't see as able to be aligned with the values we profess and it's something that I feel like in the long run will damage the field that we are in within student affairs because eventually there will stop being a pipeline of people coming in if things continue as they do now. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P6, P12, and P15 spoke to being able to get along with others, in particular colleagues. P5 further described the challenges of working with colleagues that have different lifestyle dynamics, especially those with children versus those without. The participant highlighted this challenge by stating:

> I am one of two of my colleagues at the mid-level that don't have children, whereas the rest do and there is a very weird dynamic that happens between people that are child-free versus people with children in terms of the expectation set for them and what is excusable and what is not. And that's something that is not necessarily a mid-level specific issue in higher education but more so a transitional issue as far as age. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Lack of communication. Following being a supervisor and a colleague, lack of communication emerged as a difficult challenge faced by new mid-level leaders. Seven instances (18%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. For example, P11 discussed making last minute decisions that affect the individual or the group:

> Periodically, we get tasks passed down at the last minute by our supervisors or other campus partners in which we then have to communicate these needs to our team, which makes it difficult to do when they already have so much on their plates. (P11, personal communication, March 16, 2016)

Additionally, P2, P7, P9, and P14 also spoke to lack of training and not being able to say *no* as issues with lack of communication as an entering mid-level leader. P1 further supported this claim by highlighting the term *Volun-told*, stating, "The biggest one for me is many times when you are asked to do something, you are not actually being asked, you are being told to. So where there is perceived leeway to say 'no' there really isn't" (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016). Furthermore, the near complete absence of training and materials for mid-level professionals leaves a lot open to interpretation when it comes to knowing one's role and where to start once one enters into it. P5 supported this observation by sharing, "I think of all of the training and materials I received it was probably between 6 and 8 hours total….the handouts and written materials I got were less than 10 pages so there wasn't a lot of structure" (P5, personal communication March 7, 2016).

Politics. Similar to lack of communication, seven instances (18%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. P1, P8, P4, and P12 stated that once a person reached a mid-level role he/she has considerably less control when it comes to decision-making that affects processes at the larger level. This sentiment was a trait of being a mid-level leader that many participants stated they grossly misinterpreted once they finally entered into a mid-level role. For example, P5 stressed that there is not much control at the mid-level.

> I vastly over estimated how much power is held at the mid-level and I would say that it's primarily discouraging how little decision making a mid-level actually has. It's a lot of navigating entry-level ideas that are largely good and trying to get the buy-in from upper level administrators and senior administrators to advocate for a staff while not making it look like you are advocating for a staff. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P2 and P5 further emphasized how big of a role politics play in the college and university setting, which can be very off-putting for many mid-level leaders of all levels of experience. P5 stated, "Politics really drives the department and the university, yet at the same time it drives it also holds it back" (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016). P2 took this discussion one step farther, highlighting how politics affects new professionals they supervise that are just coming out of graduate school with a certain level idealism of how higher education works from their perspective.

> I really would love to go and teach graduate school sometimes because I feel like there is a whole level of idealism that they give those students. This is great, but when we get them then we're like, "Oh no there are politics, there are decisions that are made and x, y, and z." There are many ways to get to the answer four, it's not always two plus two and I think sometimes the idea that is taught is two plus two only equals 4 this way, but there are lots of ways to get to that answer four. I think in a political large system like ours you have to be open to that. (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016)

Behind the scenes experiences. Four instances (10%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. In response to this question, P1, P4, P5, and P12 discussed the importance of learning new things and cross-training employees, transitioning as an internal hire, and moving off campus to take on a mid-level role from a live-in entry-level position. As a new mid-level leader, it is common knowledge that an individual will acquire many new skills and a lot of new knowledge within his/her role. As a result, this information may seem daunting to a new mid-level leader. Yet, P4 stated, “Although many things may seem above your head, many of the new things that you are learning at the mid-level role are just the old things you experience at the entry-level role except this time it’s at a different level” (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016). Additionally, P1 emphasized the importance of cross training or being able to perform roles outside of one’s current position:

> Without cross-training there is a lot of challenge. Some of the huge benefits I see working in my department is that we are all cross-trained to do others work. As a result, we can step in at any moment if we need to even as we become more and more specialized. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

When it comes to transitioning as an internal hire, P5 spoke to awkward relationships working as a peer with his/her previous supervisor and having to supervise individuals who were once peers at the entry-level. The individual stated, “Definitely as an internal hire the transition was something that was spoken and unspoken. Spoken in the sense that I knew it would be different, and unspoken in that I didn’t know how weird it was going to be” (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016). Lastly, P12 stated, when moving off campus from a live-in entry-level position considerations such as “the cost of living off, including commuting, paying rent, buying groceries, or relocating with your family can lead to additional stress on top of trying to become acquainted with new mid-level responsibilities" (P12, personal communication, March 16, 2016).

Job expectations. Similar to behind the scenes experiences, four instances (10%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. Specifically, P9 spoke to learning how to speak up and challenge individuals and several individuals spoke to a mid-level leader being expected to take initiative in his/her learning process as he/she becomes acquainted with his/her new role and/or institution and in creating a training for himself/herself without much help from the institution. For example, P4 stated,

> Unspoken is that you are supposed to just know things and you're supposed to come in ready to work; you also don't get that training at mid-level. You maybe get oriented and get to know people you are supposed to know but it is expected that you figure out what your job is and get working on it. (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P5 mentioned, "There is a tremendous amount of work that you do at the entry-level that you don't have to do at the mid-level and you're often encouraged to take a step back, which doesn't always feel right" (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016). P8 stated, "Characteristics that I had as an entry-level professional that I felt my supervisors really valued in me were not really valued when I got to my mid-level position. And so…I had to learn that the hard way" (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Culture. Three instances (8%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. In regard to culture, P8 and P9 discussed tradition at an institution as being important, needing to learn the culture before jumping in and suggesting changes as a mid-level professional, and experiencing microaggressions and racism in their work environment.

P8 stated that at his/her institution tradition is extremely important. As such, P8 quickly learned that before making changes at the institution as a new hire mid-level leader coming from a different institution, it was important to learn the culture of the new institution before jumping in:

> At my last institution, they wanted to change things and they wanted a lot of innovation so when I came to this new institution and I had these ideas people were like you need to slow down. That was hard for me because I was so excited about all of this stuff that I wanted to do so I think just learning that I had to learn the culture of a place before I jump right in was important. Additionally, I think it would have made my transition a lot easier. It took me while to feel as though I won over my supervisors and my colleagues. (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

P9 recalled experiencing racism and microaggressions in the field as a new mid-level leader and a person of color:

> I will say the first one is microaggressions as a challenge, both spoken and unspoken. For spoken, its been incidents of things like “Oh, that’s really smart…” like surprised that I came up with an articulate, intelligent, research-based idea or solution to an issue or concern that we are having. And I think people don’t

consciously recognize that they are doing that when they make statements like that…the surprised manner is a microaggression. (P9, personal communication, March 13, 2016)

Managing people at different skill levels. Similar to the theme of culture, three instances (8%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, managing people at different skill levels, highlighted by P9, included managing down while also managing up, this is highlighted by P2 and P7. P2's quote illustrates this theme:

> There's that capacity that in the middle you are trying to balance the folks that came in a long time ago and they have a different set of ethics, ideals, and communicating, and expectations. You have to balance that with the younger staff that is coming in because they have a very different set of ideals and you are kind of in the middle. So, you really have to answer to your professionals and be able to hold professional staff accountable but also be willing to tweak some of those expectations. (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016)

Additionally, P7 stated,

> One of the biggest challenges is that idea that I have the ability to manage down while also managing up; sometimes there is a competing interest at both of those levels. So finding a good way of understanding the politics of what that means and how to reconcile something that is coming from upper administration and making sure I can get buy-in from my staff is important. You are sandwiched in-between and the conversations that had been made previously often puts me in

interesting and challenging situations. (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016)

Interview question 2: How did you become aware of or experienced these challenges? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 12 characteristics developed. From those 12 characteristics, the following three themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) communicative efforts, (b) daily experiences, and (c) no training (See Figure 2).

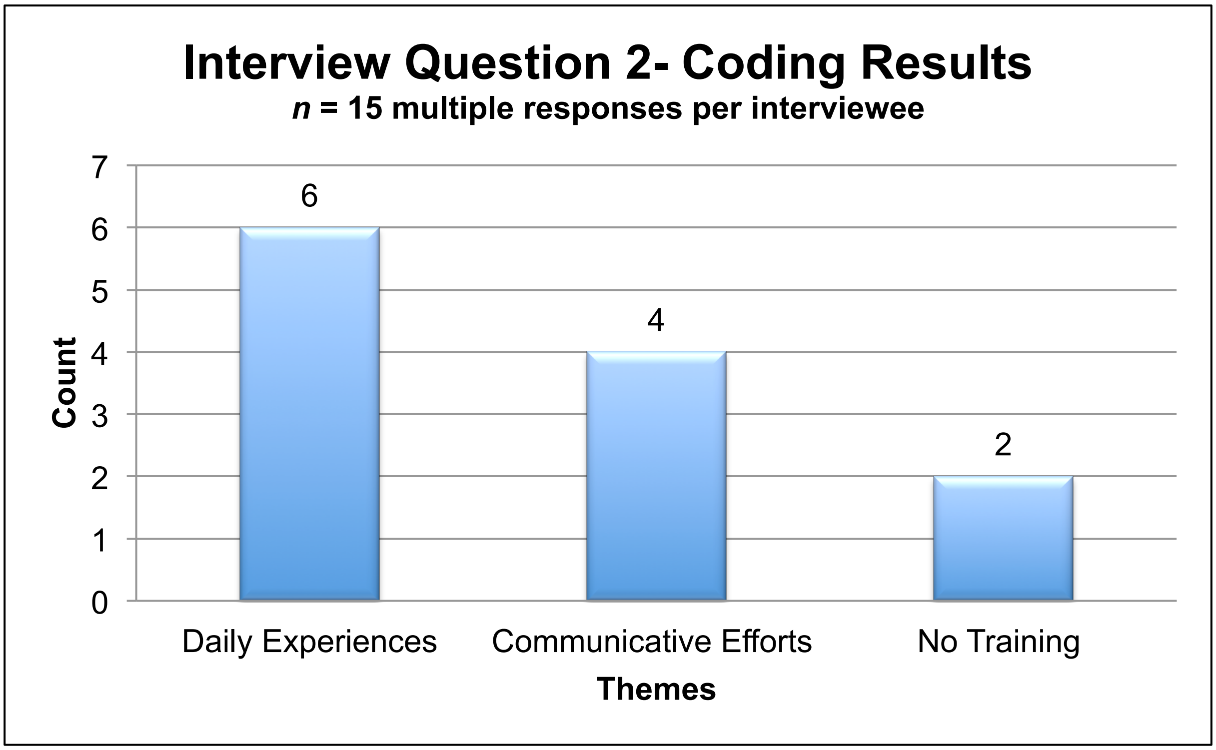

Figure 2. How individuals were made aware of their challenges as mid-level leaders. This figure demonstrates the three themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers next to each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

Daily experiences. This category emerged as the top theme for this interview question with six out of 12 instances of it (50%) being mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. For example, P3, P7, P8, and P11 spoke to day-to-day decision-making and experience, making poor choices, and being prepped by a previous supervisor as being aware of their mid-level transitional challenges. In regard to day-to-day decision-making and experiences, when asked interview question two, P3 stated the following:

> Mostly they have come about through everyday experience, mostly learning on the go. Many of the experiences I have encountered such as managing up have come directly from either my supervisor or just kind of experiencing that or just bringing those situations to her attention. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P13 stated, “though messing up,” (P13, personal communication, March 17, 2016) and P6 stated, “Making poor choices…. It’s making the mistakes in those contexts, which is how I’ve learned to address some of those unwritten rules” (P6, personal communication, March 7, 2016). P4 mentioned:

> Some of it I knew…my previous boss told me that I would wish I was still supervising RAs after working with professional staff for a while because it’s not as easy as you think so I was told about that. The rest of it is just learning as you go, no one really helps; you kind of just get into it. (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Communicative efforts. Four instances (33%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P6, P7, P8, and P10 discussed receiving feedback from their supervisors and having discussions during one-on-one’s or meetings, and asking questions themselves in order to become aware of impending challenges. For example, P8 stated:

> People communicated it to me. I had supervisors who told me I needed to slow down and so when I received feedback it was good…it was better to know the rules but it was surprising too because I was like ‘oh I didn’t realize that this was not what you were looking for. (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Additionally, P7 stated, “I’ve been very fortunate that when communication is given to me I have the opportunity to ask questions I may have myself so that I can understand the decision made” (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

No training. Two instances (17%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. Following are two excerpts to illustrate this theme. P5 stated, “I don’t think there was anything in the training that I received that actually prepared me for the challenges I faced. The only exception to that being some specific protocols while being on call that I have experienced” (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016). P1’s thoughts were also aligned with this statement:

> Honestly, I don’t feel there was any formal training…it was a fly-by-the-seat of your pants thing where you come in and there’s the “learn by doing” model. I was handed orders when I came into my current position, which was somewhat like “here read this stuff” but that was it. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

Interview question 3: What parts of your transition into mid-level management were more difficult (e.g., first month, 60 days, etc.)? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 16 characteristics developed. From those 16 characteristics, the following five themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) colleague relationships, (b) first 90 days, (c) first month, (d) supervision, and (e) understanding the role (See Figure 3).

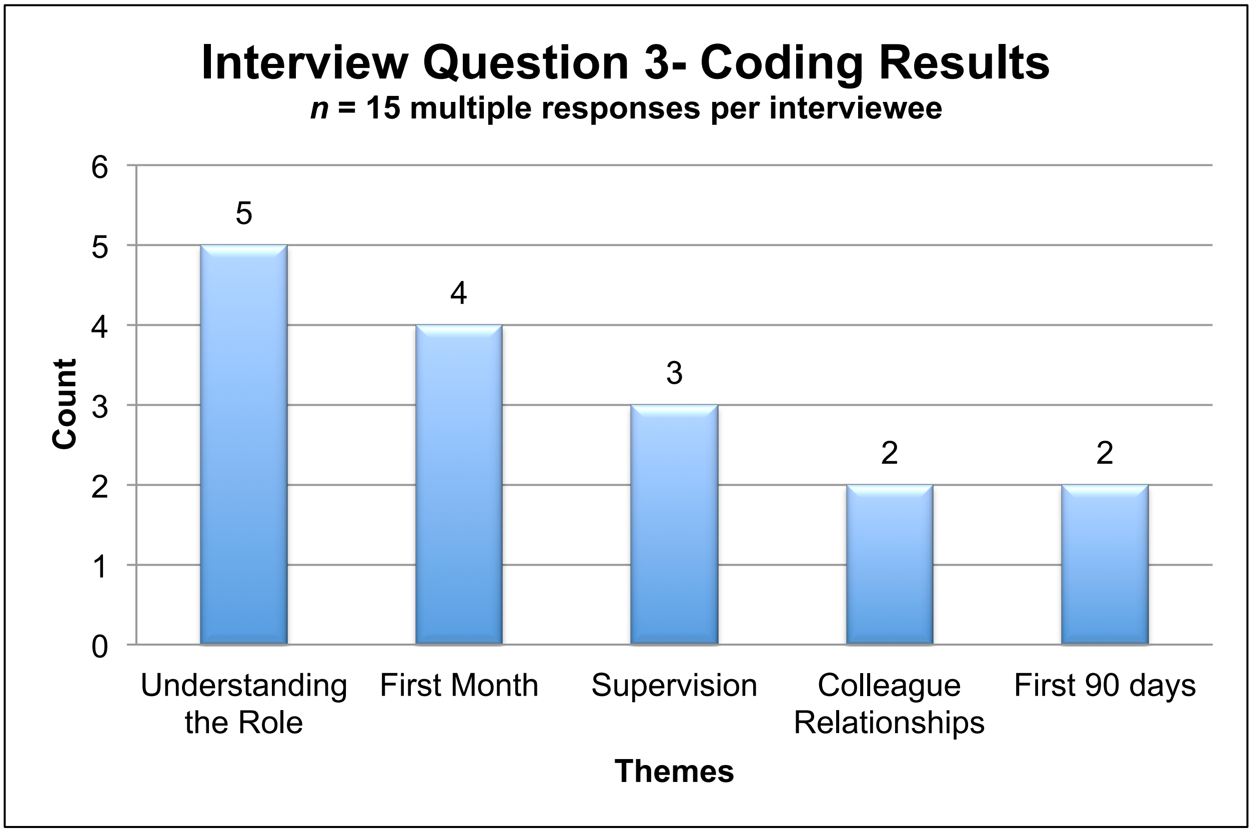

Figure 3. Difficult experiences cited when transitioning into a new mid-level position. This figure demonstrates the five themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers next to each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

Understanding the role. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question, with five instances of it (31%) being mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. For example, P2 and P5 cited the first month (25%) and the first 90 days (13%) as the most difficult period during which a new mid-level leader will transition into his/her role. P3, P8, and P14 also cited this concern, with their responses focused on understanding their individual mid-level roles during the first month to first 90 days on the job. P3 stated:

> I think the difficulties are understanding my role and then having others understand my role. Sometimes when you work internally within an organization in one role, and then you get hired into a new role, they see you in that previous role and it's hard for you to step out of that role. So, I think when I make the transition to a different institution that it will be an easier transition for me. I think within 60 days it's just really understanding that many of the decisions that are made have to be made from a greater perspective and influence and impact the department as a whole. I am no longer representing myself…. I'm representing all students that live on campus and sometimes even beyond and so that has been a large shift in thinking as well. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P8 stated, "I would say the first 3 months were hard because I was trying to figure out 'what kind of supervisor do I want to be and what is my job" (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016)? P14's thoughts aligned with this statement, stating, "Just taking everything in was the biggest challenge for me" (P14, personal communication, March 18, 2016).

Supervision. Three instances (19%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants, either directly or indirectly. In particular, P8 and P15 spoke to learning how to supervise professional staff for the first time and being comfortable with not having as much knowledge as supervisees. In regard to learning how to supervise professional staff for the first time, P8 stated:

> I would say for me that the first 3 months were difficult. I was learning how to supervise professional staff for the first time, which is different from supervising graduate students, which I had before. I was figuring out, "How do I develop these people? What are they looking for? And how do I treat them, so that they are developing in a way that is conducive to them, but also that I don't come off as if I am treating them like babies?" (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

In regard to being comfortable with not having as much knowledge as some supervisees, P10 stated:

> I think as a mid-level manager it was when my staff knew more than me or excelled in a certain area and being ok with that. Knowing that overall I had guidance and understanding of the bigger picture in a way that they didn't I could still provide them development and growth in that manner. (P10, personal communication, March 14, 2016)

***Colleague relationships*.** Two instances (12%) of this theme were mentioned by the interview participants either directly or indirectly. In particular P5 and P8 stated that not having a colleague with whom to identify and working with difficult colleagues contributed to the stress of beginning a new mid-level role, as a few individuals "liked to make things more difficult than they already were for myself and other colleagues" (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016). Additionally, P8 cited difficulties working with employees as a frustration that made him/her re-consider if mid-level leadership was the right path for him/her.

Interview question #4: To what extent did these challenges impact your career path? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 23 characteristics developed. From those 23 characteristics, the following six themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) better understanding of the position, (b) encouraged additional professional development, (c) encouraged big picture thinking, (d) encouraged reflection, (e) recognizing needed work amenities, and (f) second guessing future job roles (See Figure 4).

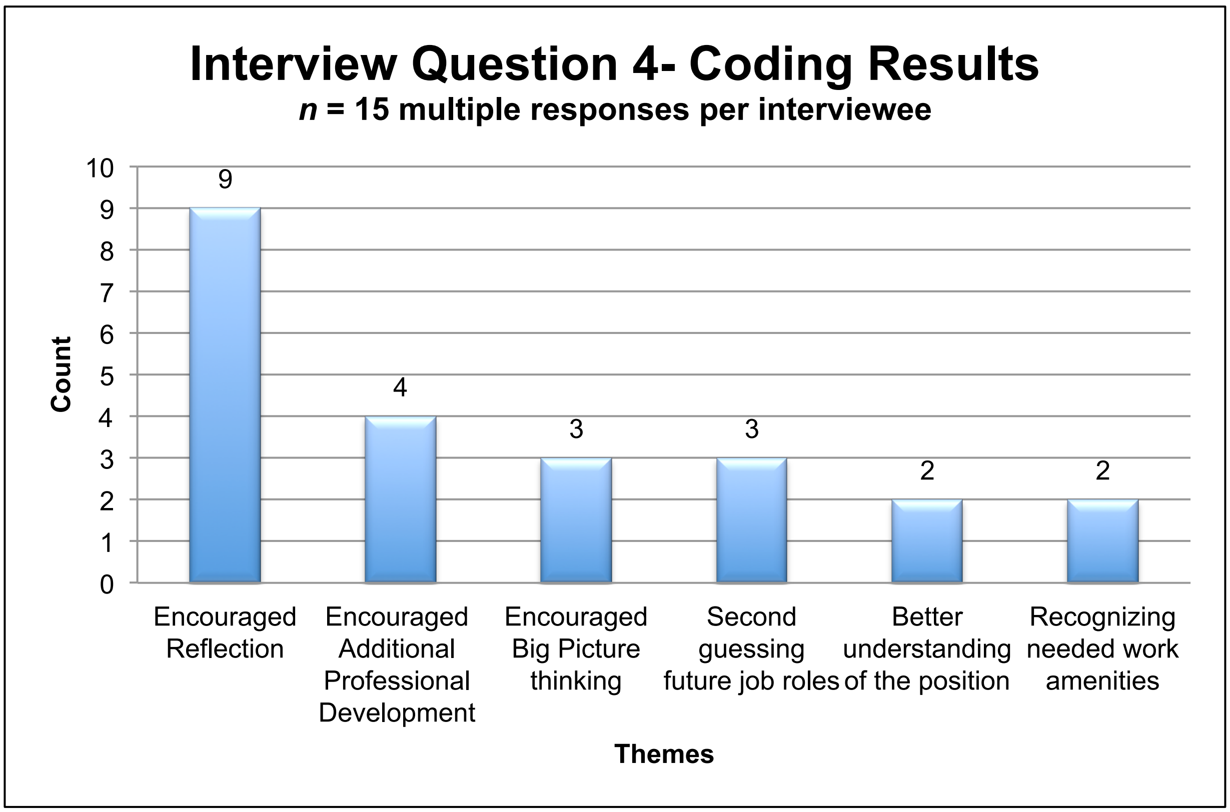

Figure 4. Extent of impact on the mid-level interview participant's career path. This figure demonstrates the five themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers next to each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

Encouraged reflection. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question with nine instances of it (39%) being mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P5, P6, P9, and P11 spoke to recognizing skills at which they were accomplished versus those on which they needed to work, allowing for introspective views regarding the pros and cons of holding their mid-level roles. Participants recognized that they had reached a *ceiling* in terms of moving up in their respective organizations, and shared thoughts about what would come next after their mid-level role. In regard to recognizing skills done well and those still needing work, P5 stated, “For me, the transition into mid-level made it very clear to me that while I had good supervision skills, I did not have strong management skills” (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016). Additionally, P7 stated:

> My career path was positively impacted because it showed my flexibility, creativity, tenacity, and gravitas to keep moving forward even when there wasn’t anything clear on paper or there wasn’t an orientation packet I was given. I made it work; and that what I am known for, making it work. (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016)

In regard to individuals recognizing that they had reached a ceiling in terms of moving up in their respective organizations, P7 had the following to say:

> I would say I’m at a point where my career can’t continue, at least here, because I’ve pretty much reached a ceiling, or that’s what I’ve been told, so I guess that would be a negative impact of the system I am in. (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016)

P9 spoke to reaching a glass ceiling as a person of color at a predominately White institution, providing an in depth description about applying for an internal job position for which he/she was qualified for but had not yet been considered.

> The first time I applied for a more mid-level student affairs role the job went to another individual [internal hire] who was a White male and had more seniority and experience than me. I didn't mind because I firmly believe in seniority and so forth. The second time a person got the same position who started a year after me and it was a White male. So I went to my supervisor and asked how could I be better in terms of my qualities and skill set to become a stronger candidate should another position open? My director gave me all of these directions and feedback about what needs to change and I said ok. Then the third time rolled around and I lost to a White female. I sort of looked at him like, "Ok I did everything I was supposed to do and I still didn't get the job, what gives?" He gave me a brief political response. One day I was sitting at a department meeting, I looked around the long table and saw that all the supervisors were white and then it dawned on me, I hit a glass ceiling. From there, I realized I had to leave. I was never going to move up no matter how well I did. So, to the extent did that challenge impact my career path? Yes, I realized I hit a wall and I needed to move on. (P9, personal communication, March 13, 2016)

In regard to contemplating next steps in one's career as a mid-level leader, P8 stated:

> I think this position is helping me realize what I want to do moving forward because of the challenges I have faced. I think because I had to jump through so many hoops to get people onboard with the initiatives I had to better the

department and then after realizing that not everyone had the buy-in that I thought they had when I was coming in…I am thinking now if I really want to make an impact on the education for students I need to be in a higher position to do that because it was really hard in my current position to move forward without getting all of these other people invested in it. Now I'm thinking about becoming a Director or Vice President in the future to have that impact on education so that the next person coming in behind me won't have to try so hard to have to get me to buy-in to something. (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

The viewpoints of P10 and P15 were a bit different. P10 stated, "I think being supervised by someone who I used to supervise has changed my future at the institution" (P10, personal communication, March 14, 2016), whereas P15 stated, "For me, its brought up the question: Do I want to continue supervising people in the future" (P15, personal communication, March 18, 2016)?

Encouraged additional professional development. Four instances (17%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. P4, P8, and P9 spoke to increasing management skills and taking on more professional development opportunities in the form of conferences, webinars, and on the job trainings. Additionally, P5 stated:

I would say that the single biggest factor that impacted my career path was in deciding to start looking at going back to school, which was something several of my former supervisors had done. When looking at improving my management skills, an MBA would be more applicable than a traditional doctorate in higher education, as it is not going to prepare me for the management that takes place within a university. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Encouraged big picture thinking. Three instances (13%) of this theme were mentioned by P6, P9, and P11 either directly or indirectly. In particular, P9 spoke to having practice working collaboratively with various departments. In particular, P11 stated, "It forced me to become a forward-thinker, anticipating my supervisor's needs and allowing for me to begin thinking like a supervisor as I aspire to hold that role in the future and would have to make similar decisions" (P11, personal communication, March 16, 2016).

Second-guessing future job roles. Similar to the theme of encouraging big picture thinking, three instances (13%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. P3, P5, and P14 spoke to contemplating whether mid-level leadership was the right path for them based on the amount of politics that go into being a university administrator at higher levels. For example, P3 stated:

> I think that before, I really wanted to go to the top but now I'm starting to second-guess that. I'm realizing the more I go up, the more political it gets and the more red tape there is…I figured when you get to the top you just make those decisions, but there is a lot more red tape that you have to deal with at the top. I also feel that there are certain things that I don't know if I want to deal with when I get up there. I've seen that you cannot make anyone happy. I had a conversation with our vice chancellor about this. I feel like every decision that this individual makes they upset a different group. For example, if this person makes a decision about a group of students, another group of students will get upset. If

> this individual makes a decision for the students, then parents may get upset, or faculty or staff may get upset, and so it’s just a really interesting dynamic. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P5’s sentiments align with P3’s thoughts:

> I don’t necessarily know that I want to move beyond mid-level in higher education. I do enjoy the work that I do but I don’t enjoy the salary that we make. Additionally, I see a lot of the senior-level positions as not being particular rewarding and at least for me, if I’m going to do something not very rewarding I’m going to need to be compensated well for it and that’s probably going to be outside of student affairs. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Better understanding of the position. Two instances (13%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P5 recognized that mid-level leaders don’t have the opportunity to make many decisions:

> In a lot of ways my supervisors were also in mid-level positions as university senior management were really the ones calling the shots and the vast majority of what I had seen as senior leadership in our department was just passing on marching orders. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Additionally, P5 highlighted that student interaction begins to wane as one moves up in the field, stating, “Another challenge is the limited student interaction that you get at the mid-level. Being that this is the part of the job that I really like its something that goes away a lot as I continue to move up” (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016).

Recognizing needed work amenities. Similar to the theme of better understanding of the position, two instances (13%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P1 and P8 spoke to having basic work supplies and support as well as working part-time in two separate buildings and the contrast noticed between both. P1 highlighted one of the benefits of a department having its own building space, citing this overlooked amenity as something sought after in future job searches.

> We have our own building and so we have restrooms that are close by and that we are not competing with students for…to just be able to do our work and take a break when we need to take a break is great. Additionally, we are able to collaborate in a way that we may not be able to because we share a private building where students don't frequent. This allows for more conversations to take place that you would normally not be able to have in public spaces, like an academic building. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

Summary of research question one. Research question one asked, What challenges do higher education institutions face in preparing staff for mid-level management and leadership roles? In order to answer this question, four interview questions were posed:

1. What have been some important challenges (spoken or unspoken) you have run into as a mid-level leader in higher education?
2. How did you become aware of or experienced these challenges?
3. What parts of your transition into mid-level management were more difficult (e.g., first month, 60 days, etc.)?
4. To what extent did these challenges impact your career path?

A total of 21 themes emerged in response to four interview questions associated with this research question. Examples of the 21 themes include: politics, being a supervisor and a colleague, lack of communication, culture, transparency, understanding the role, and reflection.

Research Question Two

Research question two asked, What can higher education institutions do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles? In order to answer this question, four interview questions were posed:

1. How could your institution have better prepared you for the challenges you described earlier?
2. What in your own previous training and preparation assisted you in overcoming these challenges?
3. What resources are or can be made available by your institution to better prepare you for a more successful transition into a mid-level leader role?
4. What positive leadership techniques and methods have worked in defining your mid-level position and leadership style in the department you lead? Follow up: Mentoring, shadowing, coaching, more education, etc.

Specific themes emerged from each of the interview questions that would then form the overall key themes to answer research question two.

Interview question 5: How could your institution have better prepared you for the challenges you described earlier? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 12 characteristics developed. From those 12 characteristics, the following two themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) need for a training program and (b) transparency (See Figure 5).

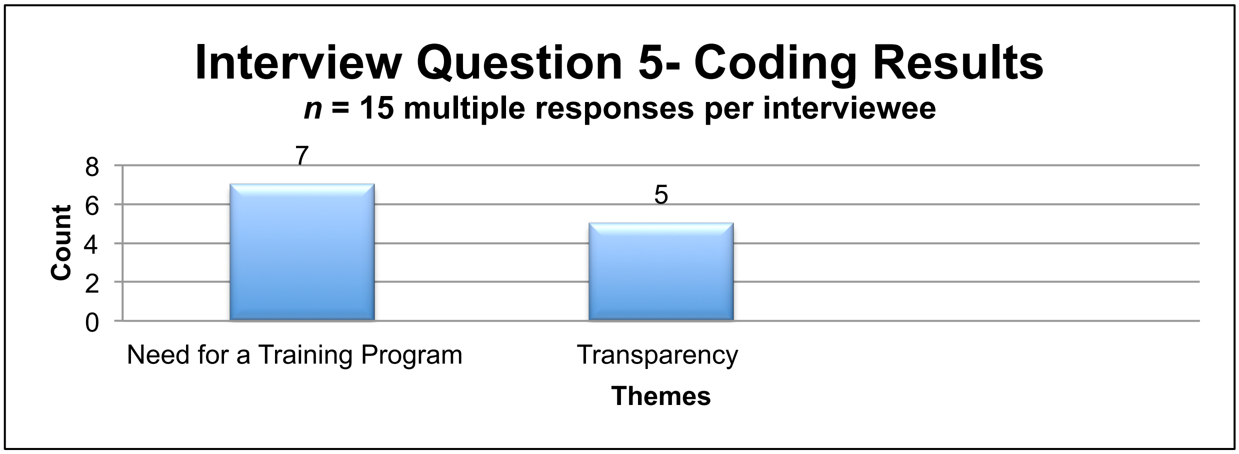

Figure 5. Suggestions for better preparing mid-level interview participants for challenges previously described. This figure demonstrates the two themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers next to each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

Need for a training program. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question with seven instances of it (58%) being mentioned by participants either directly or indirectly. P1, P3, and P6 spoke to having a formalized training that sets mid-level leaders up for success. P11, P14, and P15 spoke to the need for continued supervision training periodically throughout the academic year. In particular, P1 stated:

> I think we as a whole as an institution have talked about onboarding and how we need to better onboard people and carry them through that process and not just plop a warm body in a position and say, "Ready, set, go." I think that should be carried through with each new position, even if it's a position that hasn't existed

> before, it should be that somebody is responsible for your onboarding and making sure you understand your role and where the institution is going, and what their hopes and dreams are for you. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

***Transparency*.** Five instances (42%) of this theme were mentioned by P2, P5, and P8 either directly or indirectly. These individuals highlighted the need to understand the culture of the institution better. Additionally, having a better sense of the department, including succession planning, would help individuals have a clear road to work through various positions that they may hold throughout their time at the institution. P2 requested that departments be clear about decisions that can be made independently (as a mid-level leader) versus those that need more follow through before implementation:

> One level that even we could do better at is being clear about the decisions that mid-level leaders are able to make, and the decisions that need to be run by someone. For instance, for a new mid-level leader, educating them on when a mid-level individual can make the decisions; when a mid-level individual can make the decisions, but they need to inform the group; and when it needs to be a group decision. There are many decisions that are made at mid-level that actually would be a better decision if it were made by a collaborative group, instead of by the one person owning that project. (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016)

P5 stated:

> I would say that one area that fell very much short was in which supervisors filtered information and sheltered you from the realities of what was going on, and just made everything seem like it was supposed to be that way. But I think that it was ultimately a disservice to me, in that I was unprepared for just how much drama there was at the mid-level. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Interview question 6: What in your own previous training and preparation assisted you in overcoming these challenges? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 22 characteristics developed. From those 22 characteristics, the following three themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) identifying dependable colleagues, (b) previous work experience, and (c) resiliency and perspective (See Figure 6).

Previous work experience. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question with nine instances of it (41%) being mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. Specifically, interview participants spoke to experiencing supervising student staff, attending professional development institutes, volunteering in nonprofit work, and continuing to employ managing up.

In regard to experiencing supervising student staff, P3 stated:

> I think that no matter what level you are at you will be dealing with drama, workplace issues, staff feeling not supported, or overly supported, for example. When I was managing live-in professional staff it was not much different than managing Resident Assistant staff except that with professional staff you have to

follow HR protocols a bit tighter, as opposed to student staff. So, I think that because my experiences are very similar it saddens me to say that professional staff are as difficult as student staff. That's kind of the reality. I look at it like this: because we are humans, problems will arise, so I feel like my situation in aging and dealing with student staff have really prepared me for professional staff. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

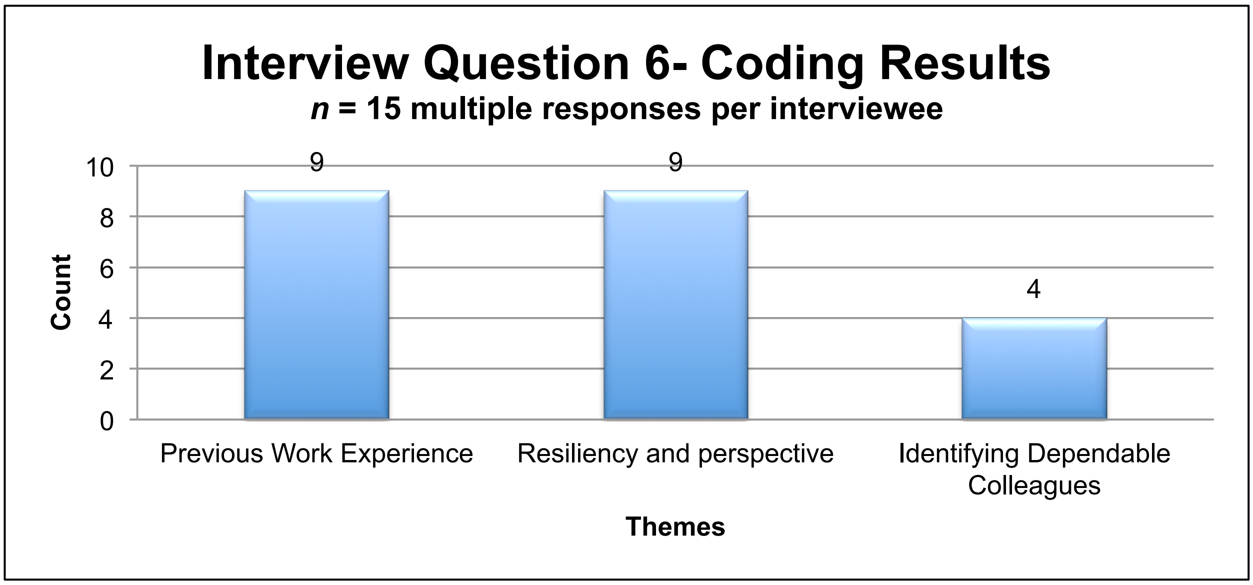

Figure 6. Previous training and preparation that assisted mid-level Interview participants in overcoming challenges previously described. This figure demonstrates the three themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers below each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

In regard to attending a mid-level managers institute, P5 mentioned that being able to attend an institute catered to mid-level managers allowed him the opportunity to connect with people who had made a similar transition into mid-level leadership. Additionally, the fact that so many mid-level leaders were echoing similar concerns about holding their respective mid-level positions allowed this individual to recognize that he wasn't alone in his concerns of being a mid-level leader.

Resiliency and perspective. Similar to the theme of previous work experience, nine instances (41%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. Specifically, P2, P3, P6, P8, and P12 highlighted being proactive and not being afraid to ask for help in overcoming their previously stated challenges. In reference to being proactive, P2 stated:

> You have to set up your own training and meetings to go out and meet folks in the department and I was cognizant of that… There was a high level of jump in and figure it out, meet with people, set up meetings on my own, and create my vision early on. (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016)

P4, P7, and P9 spoke to working and adapting to past difficult work environments and possessing a personal tenacity to be successful in one's role. Furthermore, P3 cited not being afraid to ask for help as a critical component in successfully overcoming challenges as a mid-level leader in higher education, stating, "I am also not afraid to ask for help. That's a huge component of engaging and working with folks. It's making sure that you are reaching out and gathering all the information that you can" (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016).

Identifying dependable colleagues. Four instances (18%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. Specifically, P6, P12, P13, and P15 spoke to having strong supervisors and finding people in one's institutional setting that one can trust as important experiences to consider as a new mid-level leader in higher education. In reference to having strong supervisors, P6 stated:

> I've been very fortunate to have amazing supervisors. All of them, with the exception of one, have taken the time to walk me through what's expected in my position, including some of the landmines that may exist inside or outside of the department. They have supported me when I do make a mistake and help me to understand where that mistake is coming from. Additionally, when communication challenges occur, both internally and externally, they process through that with me, and exhibited patience. They've always wanted me to be successful so that by the time I did get to the upper level positions I felt prepared and set up for success, because people wanted me to be successful. (P6, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

In reference to finding people in one's institutional setting that one can trust, P12 stated:

> Identifying people early on throughout the college that I could trust really helped me. I try to aim for having at least one person in each department that I know I can call on throughout the year, if needed. Having those relationships are invaluable. (P12, personal communication, March 16, 2016)

Interview question 7: What resources are or can be made available by your institution to better prepare you for a more successful transition into a mid-level leader role? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 15 characteristics developed. From those 15 characteristics, the following three themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) professional development opportunities, (b) training programs, and (c) transparency (See Figure 7).

Professional development opportunities. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question with 11 instances of it (73%) being mentioned

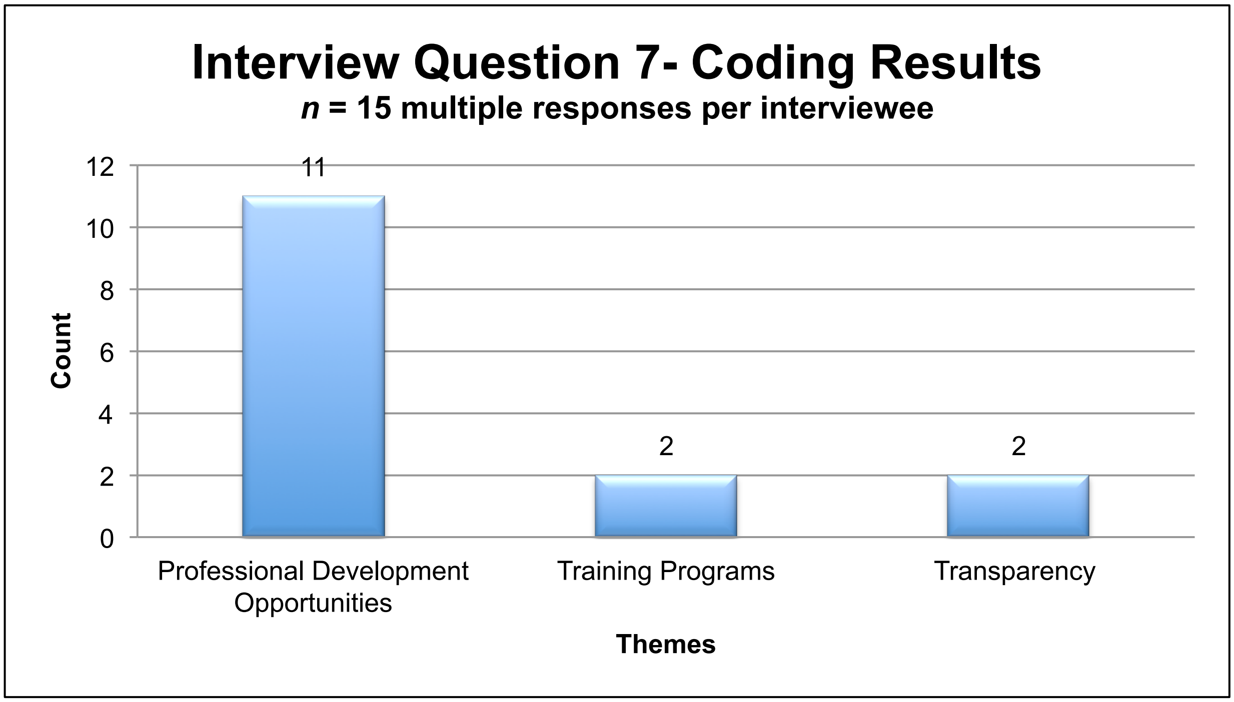

Figure 7. Resources that can be made available by an institution to prepare new mid-level leaders for a successful transition. This figure demonstrates the three themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order. The numbers below each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, interview participants spoke to opportunities that are currently taking place at their institutions and opportunities that they would like to see take place at their institutions.

For example, P1, P2, and P3 all spoke to opportunities currently offered at their institution. P1 stated, “We are very lucky, we have full access to a professional development website called Linda.com. We also have professional development funds to buy books to better ourselves and attend conferences. Additionally, we also have awesome speakers that frequently come to our campus” (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016). P2 highlighted having one-on-one conversations as beneficial, stating, “To be honest, I think what is best is one-on-ones and having those really candid conversations about what is going on behind the scenes” (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016). P5 and P7 spoke to opportunities they wish they had at their institution. For P5, this includes:

> Mentorship, and I don’t think that necessarily needs to be a supervision style of being a mentor. I think that it is connecting with someone outside of your department, still within student affairs, with similar work that you do so that you can connect with and pick their brain. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Additionally, P7 said, “I would say probably having something documented, like an orientation packet that at least gives me the items that I would need to meet, which state ‘here are the expectations’ for my job, would be helpful” (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016). P6, P8, and P9 spoke to the inclusion of more professional development opportunities, and resources in general such as books, webinars, etc. P12, P14, and P15 highlighted the need for professional development sessions that help leaders understand how to build trust within a new team.

Training programs. Two instances (13%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. P6 and P8 highlighted having a tangible take away such as an orientation packet that offers new leaders an initial set of goals to meet within their first few weeks of employment in order to get acclimated to their new campus and/or area. P8 stated:

> I know that it’s hard to do that but I think more formal training that speaks to “What does it mean to be a mid-level leader? How do you do good supervision with professionals? How do you do good professional development with

professionals?” Things like that would be beneficial. (P8, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Transparency. Similar to training programs, two instances (13%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. P5 mentioned, “having more transparency, in terms of decision-making and institutional politics” (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016). P7 described being told more about the culture of the institution as a beneficial resource to prepare for one’s successful transition into one’s new mid-level leadership role.

Interview question 8: What positive leadership techniques and methods have worked in defining your mid-level position and leadership style in the department you lead? Follow up: Mentoring, shadowing, coaching, more education, etc. Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 24 characteristics developed. From those 24 characteristics, the following seven themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) authentic leadership, (b) mentorship, (c) observation, (d) organization & administration, (e) positive psychology, (f) reflection, and (g) servant leadership (See Figure 8).

Organization and administration. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question, with six instances of it (25%) being mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P3, P7, and P9 spoke to focusing on competencies and skills as elements of a successful transition. In particular, P9 described strategic planning, organization and administration, and transparency as positive techniques and methods that have worked in defining a mid-level position and leadership style. Furthermore, P10, P11, and P12 emphasized learning to step back as a successful skill to employ. Specifically, P10 described learning to step back as a positive leadership technique, noting, “For me, its been learning to step back and really encouraging my staff; so employing the empowerment model. I think when you try to get too involved that is when people begin to look at you like a micro-manager.” (P10, personal communication, March 14, 2016)

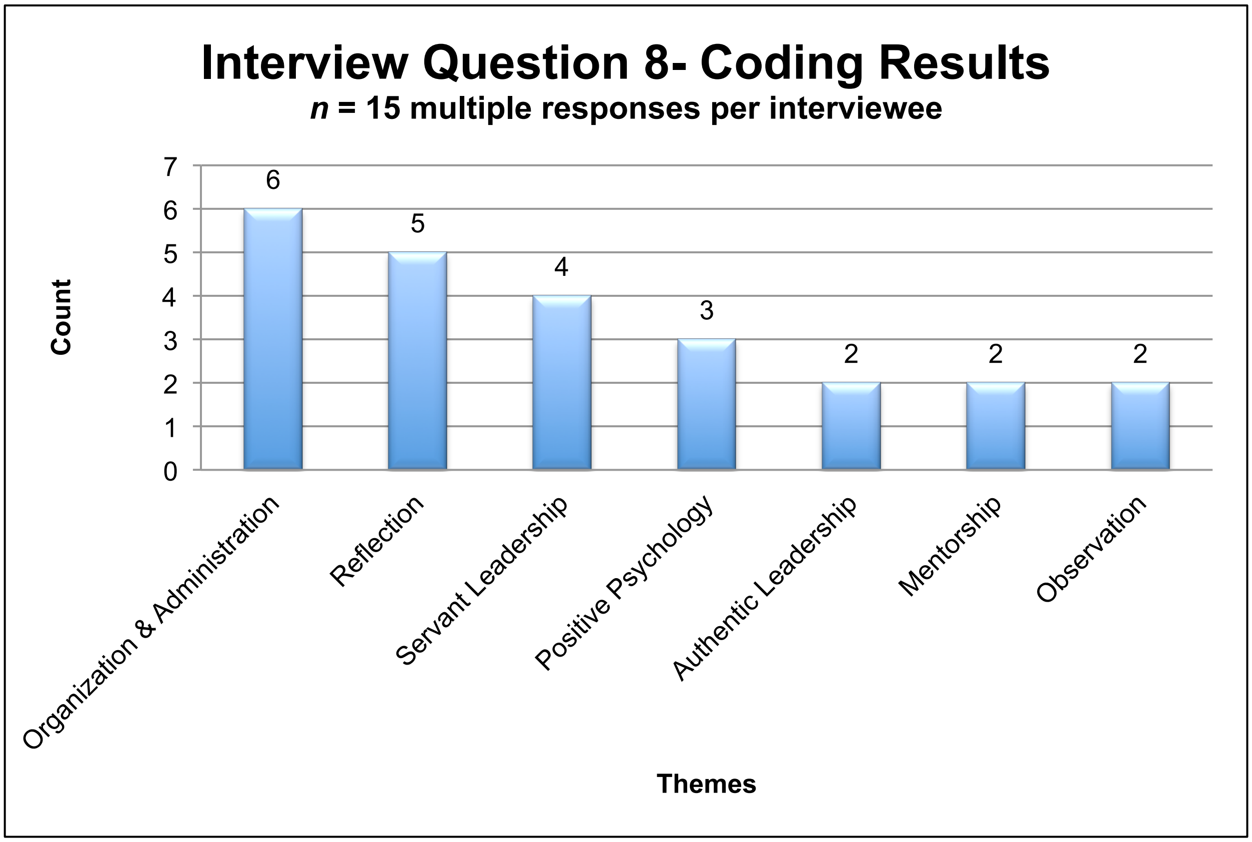

Figure 8. Positive leadership techniques and methods that have worked in defining a mid-level position and leadership style. This figure demonstrates the seven themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order. The numbers below each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

Reflection. Five instances (21%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P1, P2, P6, P13, and P15 highlighted recognizing their current working and leadership style and how that plays a part in the work environment, maintaining a positive reputation, and receiving feedback from colleagues. For example, in regard to maintaining a strong reputation, P1 stated:

> I've seen people have a one off negative encounter and be fine but then there are people who have continued negative interactions with people and when you keep hearing 'this person is not great to work with' it starts to embed in your brain, even if you try to keep it out if you are not working with that person. So you really have to move forward and be your best self when you can, and when you can't just shut your office door. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

In regard to feedback from colleagues, P2 stated:

> For me, I am very intuitive and so I tend to go too much off my intuition and what I am feeling at the moment. I think one of the things that has helped me inform that is books. To be honest, my colleagues have really informed me about my leadership to give me feedback, both good and bad. (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016)

Servant leadership. Popularized by Robert Greenleaf, servant leadership speaks to leaders who focus on meeting the needs of their team (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). Similar to transformational leadership, a servant leader brings out the best in his or her team, coaches and encourages individuals, and facilitates personal growth. These individuals focus on how to respect values and motivate those who report to them (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002). Four instances (17%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. P2, P6, P13, and P15 spoke to getting to know individuals as a whole, including what their goals were, in order to help them reach and maximize their individual potentials. P6 aligned with this claim by stating:

> I have three expectations with my staff: empowerment, ownership, and accountability. I think that is pulled from various leadership techniques and models. So going into a new position, provide the staff an opportunity to be empowered. Empower them to be successful in the work that they do, providing the support and education to help them as they make choices. And as a new person coming into that role, that's educating me on what the environment looks like and then having conversations on accountability. So, if you say you are going to do something, do it and "How can I help with that?" I do everything that I can to be flexible with deadlines; so it's not about me holding you accountable, it's about you holding yourself accountable and I am here to help. (P6, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Positive psychology. This theme focuses on what makes individuals happy and how they can be lead to a fulfilling and satisfying life by encouraging factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to succeed (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Four instances (17%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. P1, P7, P10, and P11 discussed possessing empathy and relationship building as invaluable tools to possess as a leader. For example, P1 mentioned:

> I feel like positive psychology works really well. While we do face challenges, we try to approach them from a positive light. So if you are having a challenge with someone, instead of coming up and saying, "You're doing this wrong," using

motivational interviewing skills helps to get them to their best answer. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

Authentic leadership, mentorship, and observation. Following positive psychology, authentic leadership, mentorship, and observation were all mentioned an equal number of times in regard to resources that can be made available by an institution to prepare new mid-level leaders for a successful transition. Two instances (8%) for each of these three themes were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. For example, in regard to mentorship, P7 and P12 spoke to the ability to foster mentorship opportunities on campus and build relationships with colleagues. Additionally, in regard to observation, P10 and P14 discussed watching and learning from others about how to navigate their institution successfully as a new mid-level leader. Regarding authentic leadership, P5 and P8 mentioned the concept of employing authentic leadership. P8 stated:

> I believe in authentic leadership. I want to make sure that I am myself and that I'm not trying to be someone else, and that is something I read about a lot and what that means for us as individuals. I know that this is something I still use and something that I had to try to fight for a little bit because I felt like people were trying to mold me to something else and I was like, "That's not me." Staying authentic to myself, the type of leader that I want to be; the type of supervisor that I want to be; I think that's really helped me stay centered and really figure out what works best for me but also what can work for my institution. (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Summary of research question two. Research question two asked, What can higher education institutions do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles? In order to answer this question, four interview questions were posed:

1. How could your institution have better prepared you for the challenges you described earlier?
2. What in your own previous training and preparation assisted you in overcoming these challenges?
3. What resources are or can be made available by your institution to better prepare you for a more successful transition into a mid-level leader role?
4. What positive leadership techniques and methods have worked in defining your mid-level position and leadership style in the department you lead?

A total of 15 themes emerged in response to the four interview questions associated with this research question. Examples of the 15 themes included: need for a training program, previous work experience, resiliency and perspective, observation, mentorship, and authentic leadership.

Research Question Three

Research question three asked, How do higher education institutions measure their success in preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles? In order to answer this question, three interview questions were posed:

1. How would you personally describe the elements of a successful transition to mid-level management?

2. How could these elements be measured and tracked by the institution to ensure a successful transition to mid-level management?
3. As a mid-level leader, what methods did YOU employ to benchmark and track your own progress and success as you prepared for and transitioned into your new position?

Specific themes emerged from each of the four interview questions that would then form the overall key themes to answer research question three.

Interview question 9: How would you personally describe the elements of a successful transition to mid-level management? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 32 characteristics developed. From those 32 characteristics, the following six themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) building relationships, (b) knowing your job, (c) leading by example, (d) patience, (e) taking initiative, and (f) understanding the culture (See Figure 9).

Knowing your job. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question, with eight instances of it (25%) being mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. P1, P2, P6, and P12 specifically spoke to knowing that mid-level leaders are responsible for their transition, and it is important to embrace the role and not the paycheck. Additionally, it is important to be a strong administrator and be able to think both telescopically and microscopically.

P4 substantiated these themes by stating, “it is important to know that you are responsible for your transition. You’re a mid-level now for a reason so own your transition and prepare yourself as much as you can” (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016). P7 suggested having clear, written expectations and the opportunity to have discussions around those expectations as an element to having a successful transition into mid-level management.

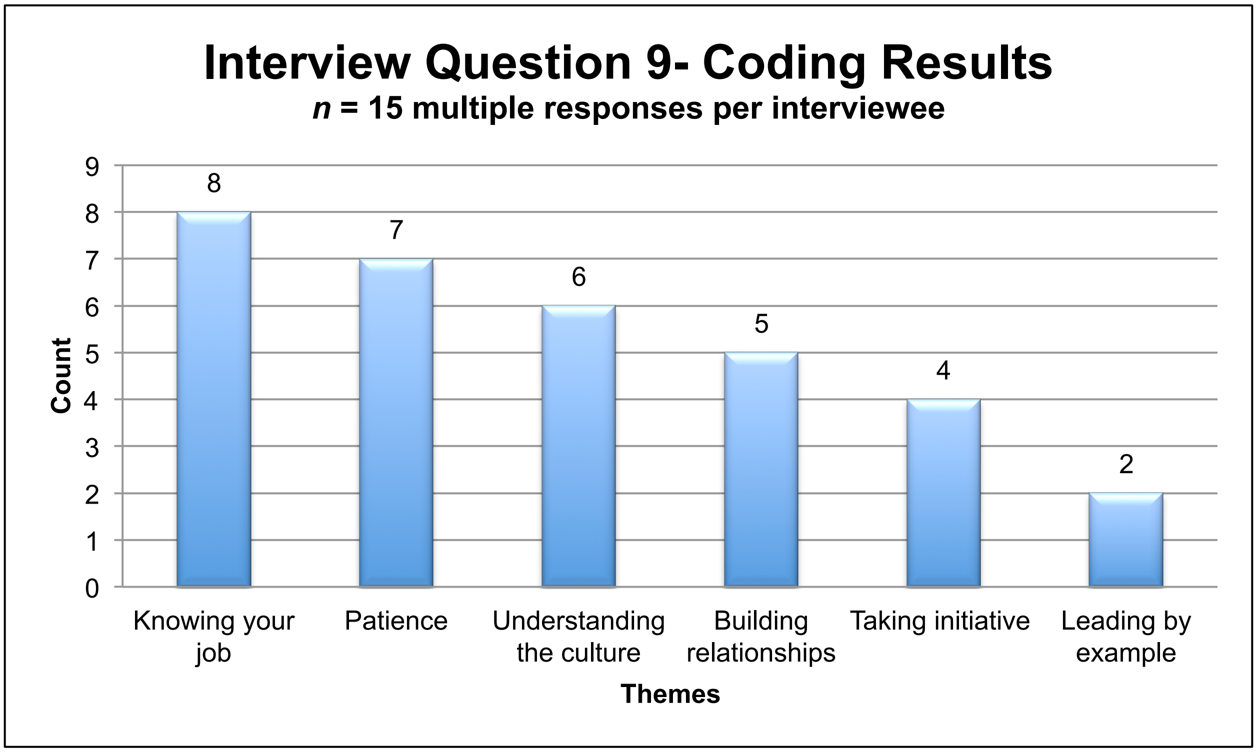

Figure 9. Elements of a successful transition to mid-level management. This figure demonstrates the six themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order. The numbers below each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

P10 spoke to embracing the mid-level role and not doing it for a paycheck, stating:

> Although we do love jobs for the paycheck, I think when I see burnout, in either myself or peers, it tends to be because I moved up. Not because I wanted to be seen as making a bigger difference in this arena but because I wanted the paycheck or the perks that went with it and didn't really look at the role I was taking on or embraced that. (P10, personal communication, March 14, 2016)

P9's thoughts align with P10's sentiments:

> In order to transition, you have to be a strong administrator. If you are just looking to move up to get paid more money or be the boss, then you are going to flounder because your staff is going to know that, and they are going to revolt against you. If you want to be a manager you have to be able to tell yourself "I am ready to lead," not "I'm ready to get paid more;" there is a big difference in those two statements. (P9, personal communication, March 13, 2016)

Finally, in regard to being able to think both telescopically and microscopically, P5 stated:

> There is a need to think both big picture and fine-detailed, as well as thinking immediate needs, and thinking 15 years from now all at the same time. There is also the fact that inevitably there's always a bigger picture, and there is content that won't be shared with you by immediate managers or by university administration. You sort of have to be ok with it, even if you are not ok with it. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Patience. Seven instances (21.8%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, interview participants mentioned being flexible and patient with oneself and others, trying things out and being all right with potentially failing, learning about oneself and being confident with one's leadership style, and recognizing that the first year in a new role should be a learning year. P1 stated: "Your first year is your learning year. Don't try to come in and change too many things. While something like low-hanging fruit is easy to change, understand the institution before you try to implement larger scale change" (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016).

Additionally, participants noted that during the first year, new mid-level leaders should be flexible and patient with themselves. P8 stated that one of the main elements is flexibility, when you are new to a mid-level role you don't really know what to expect. As such, P4 admonished, "Be patient with yourself, there is a lot to learn and you will get headaches and feel as though you don't know anything, but you were hired to the position for a reason so just give yourself time" (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016) P3 stated:

> I think empathy and forgiveness is a huge part of transition for those who are above and below. Because we will make mistakes, and I believe that anybody at any position will make a mistake, I think that it is really important for this experience to be a learning and growth opportunity instead of a "you really can't do this" opportunity. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P4 and P9 provided further insight to mid-level leaders in terms of needing to possess confidence themselves and their role. P4 mentioned, "You should really learn yourself, know who you are, and be confident and comfortable with what your style is." Furthermore, P9 mentions:

> You have to have confidence in yourself, and you have to have confidence in the staff you are going to supervise. If you don't have confidence in yourself, you are going to flounder and you are going to fail. You should also have decision-making ability. It's ok to be a processor, but if that's all you are going to do you're going to fail as a manager. (P9, personal communication, March 13, 2016)

Finally, P3 stated:

> I think that 1 full academic year would be an appropriate transition period because every quarter or every semester, depending on what school you are in, changes and there are always new things occurring. So you kind of have to go through 1 full academic year to really understand what has just happened and then be able to move forward from there. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Understanding the culture. Six instances (18.75%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P2, P4, P7, P9, P12, and P14 mentioned the importance of knowing the politics involved and understanding the overall climate with one’s immediate team, university, and student body. P7 stated, in addition to understanding the campus climate, “Really understanding what the expectations of the students are for the services that we are going to provide is important” (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016).

Building relationships**.** Five instances (15.6%) of this theme were mentioned either directly or indirectly by the interview participants. In particular, P2, P3, P5, P6, and P7 placed a focus on receiving proper and actionable feedback and a high level of commitment and support from upper management, developing relationships, knowing you can’t make people happy all the time, and decreased tension. In regard to encouraging a high level of support from upper management, P3 mentioned receiving proper and actionable feedback would be an element of a successful transition.

P3 and P5 spoke to developing relationships and realizing that mid-level leaders can’t make people happy all the time. Specifically, P7 stated that in order to develop successful campus relationships, “Understanding whom our partners are that we work with and what the relationship is like is important. Additionally, asking intentional questions, such as, ‘Financially how are we doing?’ is also important” (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016). Furthermore, being aware that one will not always make people happy is a reality of being a mid-level leader.

P5 highlighted this claim by stating:

> Know that you will not be able to make people happy all the time, and you probably aren’t going to make people happy the majority of the time; but you are going to make people happy at the times that are critical to them. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Moreover, P6 stated,

> The biggest element of a successful transition is decreased tension with others that you work with. Not ‘no tension’ because I think tension is a good thing to have as it allows people to have differences in opinion and through conflict new ideas come about. (P6, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Taking initiative. Four instances (12.5%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P2, P9, P10, and P15 cited being ready to jump into a mid-level role, being able to ask questions, and being able to listen as elements of a successful transition. Specifically, P2 stated, “I think being willing to jump in, ask questions, and make mistakes, but also being willing to take initiative is important” (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016).

Leading by example. Lastly, two instances (6.25%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P4 and P5 spoke to modeling situational leadership and possessing the characteristics of resiliency and the ability to compromise.

For example, in regard to modeling situational leadership, P4 stated:

> Although your style is one way, you should adjust it for people you lead in order to meet them where they are developmentally and work toward having a higher performing team. This is something that they typically don't tell you once you reach mid-level. (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Interview question 10: How could these elements be measured and tracked by the institution to ensure a successful transition to mid-level management?

Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 16 characteristics developed. From those 16 characteristics, the following three themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) additional structures, (b) assessment, and (c) discussions (See Figure 10).

Assessment. This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question with eight instances of it (50%) being mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P2, P4, P5, and P7 spoke to having mid-level leaders take pre- and post-assessments, as well as periodic assessments throughout the year, to gauge their progress at the institution. Additionally, P8, P9, P10, and P13 discussed examining widely accepted professional development models and integrating them into the campus culture. Specifically, in regard to pre- and post-surveys and periodic assessments, P13 stated:

> I think implementing pre- and post surveys will allow institutions to have more intentional conversations with current or departing employees to determine ways

> to better increase the intentionality of providing leaders the resources within their university environment to succeed and feel supported. As a result, this could hopefully lead to increased retention rates of mid-level leaders and reduce higher potentials for burnout. (P13, personal communication, March 17, 2016)

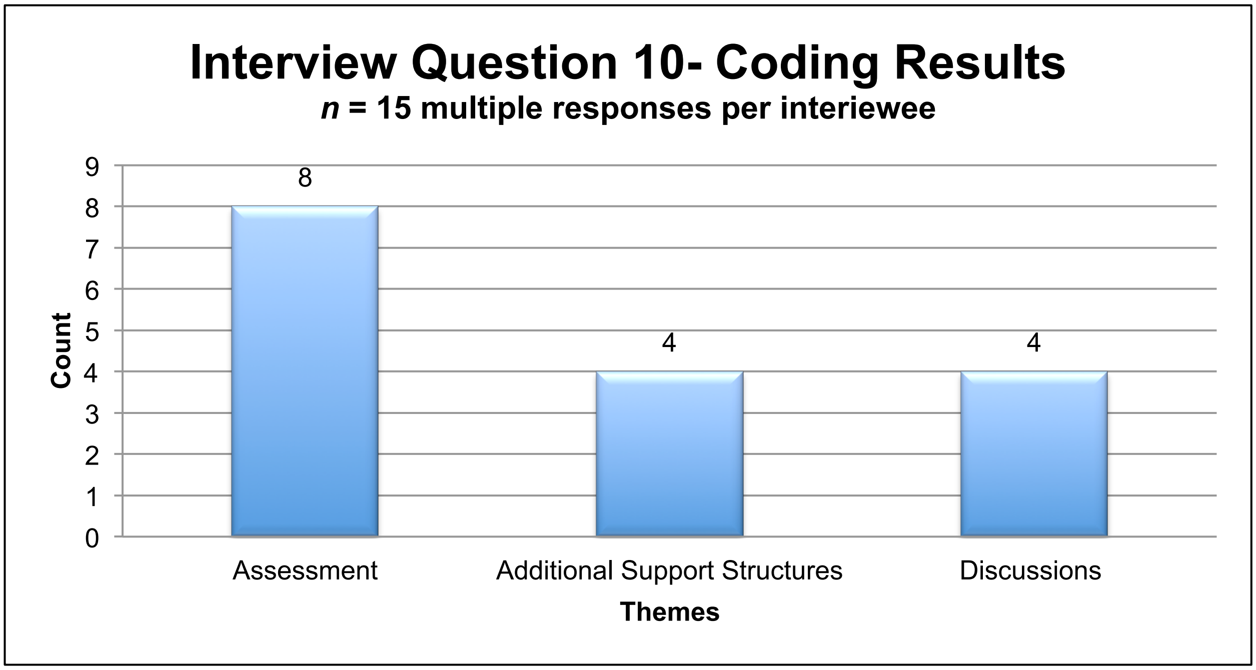

Figure 10. Ways the elements of a successful transition can be measured and tracked. This figure demonstrates the three themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers next to each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

Additionally, P4 mentioned:

> I think an institution looking and going, "What are the things people have done to be successful in the position in the past?" should be used as the core competencies in a training program. This will give individuals a guiding point by saying, "Here are things that you need to be striving for when you are working at this institution." (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Additional support structures*.* Four instances (25%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. Particularly, P8, P12, P13, and P14 highlighted establishing better networks and incorporating mentorship pairings into onboarding. In regard to establishing better networks, P8 suggested having periodic meet ups with other mid-level leaders in their region so that individuals can better network since as the higher one moves up in the field, the smaller their network becomes within their respective fields..

Discussions**.** Similar to additional support structures, four instances (25%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P4, P5, P8, and P9 discussed defining failure, having weekly or biweekly meetings with new mid-level leaders, and creating relationships with people to give and receive meaningful feedback. For example, in regard to employing weekly or biweekly meetings, P9 stated:

> I think…weekly or biweekly meetings are important especially for new managers because they are still learning. Just as we are very hands on with entry-level professionals, the same should happen for mid-level professionals as well because they are very much in the same learning stage as a new professional, in the sense that they are learning a new job. We, as senior administrators, make that mistake by thinking, “Oh this person has 3 to 5 years or 7 years in front line experience, they ‘got this,’” and no they don’t “got this;” they need a lot of help. Particularly, since they are mid-level managers, they need more help as now you are talking about legal and litigation issues, because if they say something wrong; if it is against HR policy, now you have lawyers involved. So you need to

mitigate all that stuff and make sure you are providing a lot of resources and feedback to your staff. (P9, personal communication, March 13, 2016)

Interview question 11: As a mid-level leader, what methods did YOU employ to benchmark and track your own progress and success as you prepared for and transitioned into your new position? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 15 characteristics developed. From those 15 characteristics, the following three themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) having end goals, (b) professional development, and (c) reflection (See Figure 11).

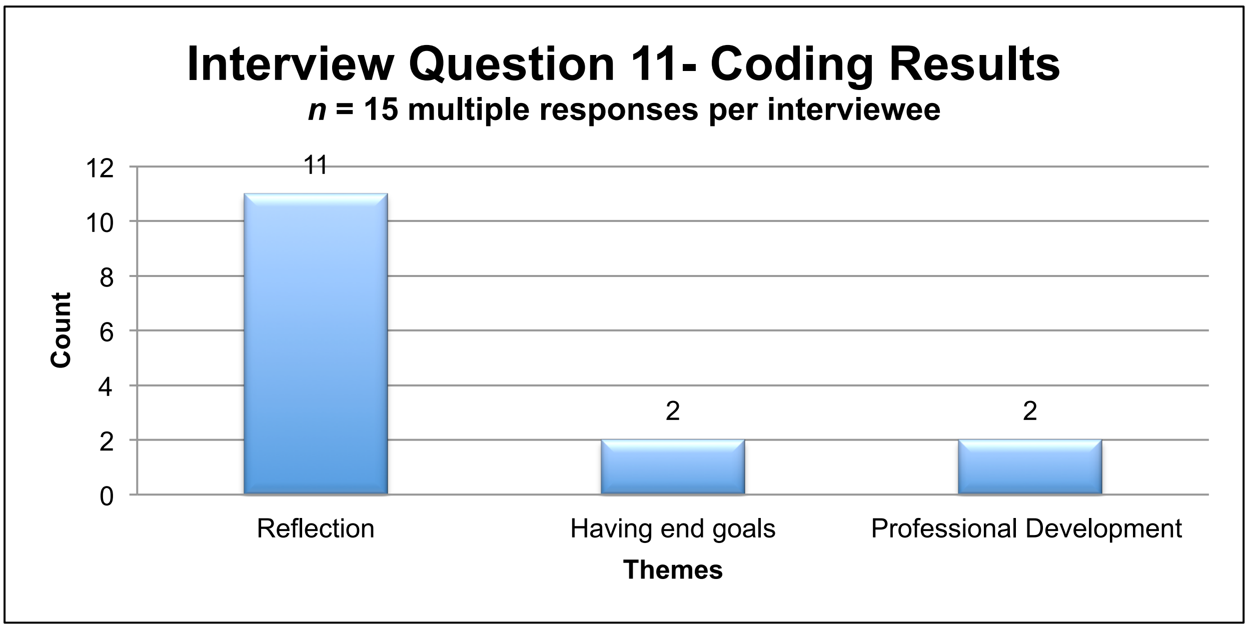

Figure 11. Methods employed by current mid-level leaders to track personal progress. This figure demonstrates the three themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers next to each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

***Reflection*.** This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question, with 11 instances of it (73.3%) being mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, and P8 highlighted employing periodic personal assessments to determine if they were still bringing added value to their team and course correcting as needed. Some individuals made sure that they avoided falling into complacency. P3 stated:

> I've seen people in the past that have just become complacent and that really hurts the students and so I really don't want that occurring with me. I really want to make sure that I am pushing myself and making sure that I am being fully engaged. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P9, P10, P12, P13, and P14 stated that they kept portfolios or referred to their periodic formal evaluations from supervisors for feedback. In particular, P9 stated that he/she asks himself/herself: Have I completed my goals? Where are my peers? And what positions can I take on within my professional associations?

> My first benchmark I ask myself is: have I completed the goals that I wanted to complete? It then becomes an indicator for me to decide, "Ok, what's next?" Otherwise, you start to coast, which is what many mid-levels do. But coasting leads to stagnation, stagnation leads to poor performance, and the next thing you know they are trying to push you out. So I think another benchmark I use on my own for transition is, "Where are my peers in the field?" I have a good cache of folks that started around the same time as me so, "Where are they now? Oh, this one just became a director, so I should be heading in that same direction." And third, it's sort of opportunities for transition. I think when we think of opportunities for transition we think of our jobs and not so much of getting actively involved in professional organizations, but those are great ways to contribute to your

> advancement and development within the field and your role. (P9, personal communication, March 13, 2016)

Having end goals. Two instances (13.3%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P1 and P3 discussed the contrast between being outcome-oriented versus process-oriented. P1 stated:

> For me it's about end goals. I'm noticing more about myself, I am outcome-oriented more than process-oriented. Although I want the process to go well, when I become process-oriented it is because of the outcome; so, if I can have a goal in mind it helps me. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

Professional development. Similar to having end goals, two instances (13.3%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, interview participants spoke to reading the ACPA/NASPA competencies and staying knowledgeable in the field in order to stay up-to-date on trends in higher education. In regard to reading ACPA/NASPA competencies, P5 stated:

> Definitely before this, using the joint ACPA/NASPA competencies. The department had structured competencies for the entry-level professionals and that very clearly told me that I was beyond the level of where I was going to learn anything from another year in the entry-level role. I would say that along with conversations with my supervisor and really thinking through decisions that helped me determine that I was ready and done with entry-level. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

With respect to staying knowledgeable in the field, P10 had the following to say:

> I focused on the CAS system [Council for Advancement of Standards in Higher Education] looking at what makes a department do well. I also look at myself as a professional to answer how I could be apart of a department that would meet those requirements and suggestions to make sure that we were providing good service to our students. (P10, personal communication, March 14, 2016)

Summary of research question three. Research question three asked, How do higher education institutions measure their success in preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles? In order to answer this question, three interview questions were posed:

1. How would you personally describe the elements of a successful transition to mid-level management?
2. How could these elements be measured and tracked by the institution to ensure a successful transition to mid-level management?
3. As a mid-level leader, what methods did YOU employ to benchmark and track your own progress and success as you prepared for and transitioned into your new position?

A total of 12 themes served to answer the three interview questions associated with this research question. Those 12 themes were as follows: knowing your job, taking initiative, patience, understanding the culture, building relationships, leading by example, assessment, trainings, discussions, additional support structures, having end goals, reflection, and professional development.

Research Question Four

Research question four asked, What recommendations do higher education institutions make for creating successful career advancement programs? In order to answer this question, two interview questions were posed:

1. What advice or cautionary measures would you give to those aspiring to mid-level leadership positions?
2. Is there anything else you wish to add?

Specific themes emerged from the two interview questions that would then form the overall key themes to answer research question four.

Interview question 12: What advice or cautionary measures would you give to those aspiring to mid-level leadership positions? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, 30 characteristics developed. From those 30 characteristics, the following six themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) be challenged, (b) be reflective, (c) be strategic (d) know limitations, (e) lead by example, and (f) understand the culture (See Figure 12).

***Be strategic*.** This category emerged as the top theme related to this interview question with 11 instances of it (36.6%) being mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. For example, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P11, and P15 spoke to titles creating barriers, embracing the mid-level mindset as an entry-level professional, developing the ability to find out the answer *why*, finding a peer group outside of the people you supervise, guarding your reputation, and avoiding absolute promises.

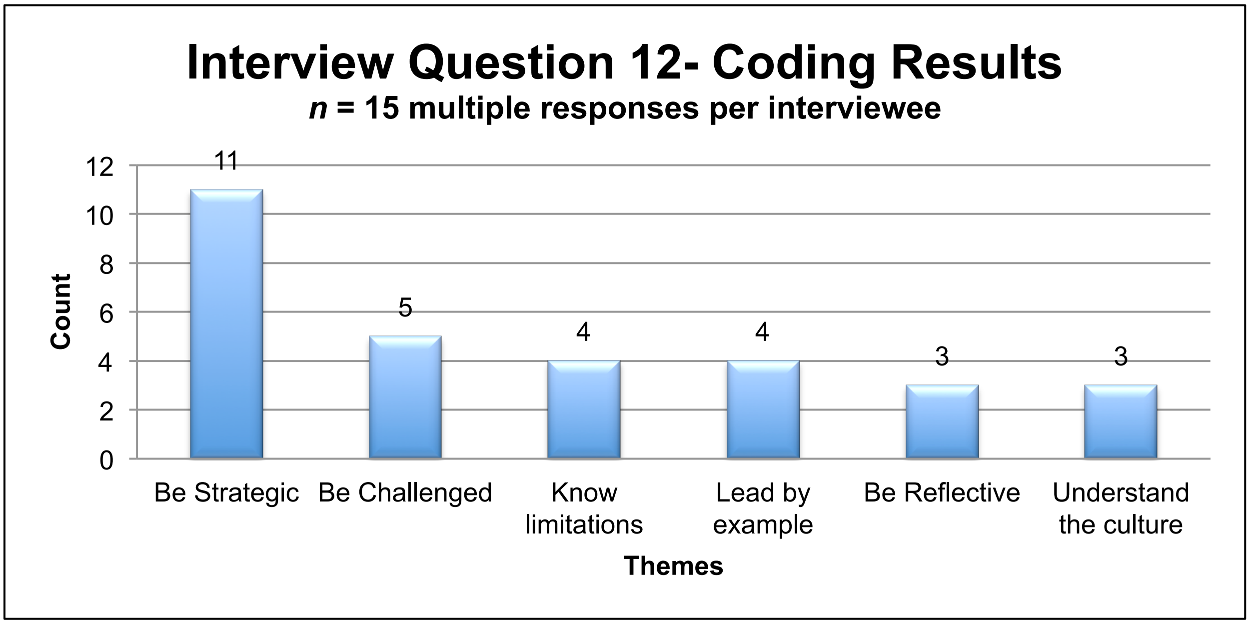

Figure 12. Advice or cautionary measures given to those aspiring to mid-level leadership positions. This figure demonstrates the six themes that have emerged from responses answering the stated interview question, presented here in decreasing order of frequency. The numbers next to each theme indicate the number of times a direct or indirect statement was made by an interview participant that fell into the respective theme category.

For example, P4 recalled the following:

> I remember as a new mid-level leader looking at decisions my predecessors made and thought, “Would I have done it like that? Why or why not?” and that’s something I would suggest for future mid-level leaders also, looking at what someone else has done and saying, “How would I put myself in that role?”…Act like you are in a mid-level role now, don’t wait to get mid-level to act like you are in a mid-level. At least for my team, when we are looking at candidates [who are entry-level] and interviewing them for mid-level roles we want them to be able to talk from the mid-level mindset even though they are not there yet vs. talking from entry-level. If they do talk from that entry-level mindset, we don’t really consider them that high for the position because we want them to be able to

> demonstrate their intentionality within their thinking process. (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P6 advised individuals to not take the first shiny thing that comes along and to make sure that as a new mid-level leader one enjoys the environment that they will live in aside from work. P1 cautioned individuals to know that every institution is different. What may frustrate an individual at one institution may be the same thing one ends up appreciating if they were to leave that institution and go to another institution.

P3 stated:

> Titles create barriers. As a mid-level leader, you have to be mindful of those barriers. For example, for those who are assistant directors, when you have the word "director" in your title it can really create a barrier for a student and we kind of have to remind ourselves of why we are doing the work that we are doing. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P5 advised:

> Find a cohort and peer group outside of the people you supervise. Ideally, at least one person who is completely removed from your institution that you can bounce ideas off of or vent to when needed and not be concerned about it coming back up at your institution. [I suggest you] develop the ability to find out the answer to "why?" without asking the question "why?" A lot of my senior administrators and managers get really upset when you ask them "why?" and won't necessarily tell you to stop asking it, yet its clear they become threatened and shut down but it's important that you are able to ask "why?" and find out that

> answer. It’s just finding the best way to do that for your particular situation. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

P9 stated:

> Guard your reputation well. I tell all my mentees this, and the way you guard your reputation well is by being a strong administrator. Additionally, make your deadlines, plan ahead, be successful, aspire to greatness, get involved, and be passionate about it. (P9, personal communication, March 13, 2016)

P5 recommended to avoid making promises and mentioning anything that is absolute. Especially when one may be representing their department/institution or they are outside of their department/institution. Lastly, P9 advised mid-level leaders to get involved, as being involved is important whether one is involved in university-wide committees, faculty/staff committees, associations on campus, or regional, state, or national associations; those are key to moving up to mid-level.

Be challenged. Five instances (16.6%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, they spoke to individuals being comfortable with periodically making mistakes, being challenged by colleagues, continuing to seek knowledge, and making sure that one understands that in the end everything is going to be all right. For example, in regard to being willing to make mistakes, P3 stated that as a leader it is ok to fail at times; what counts is, as a leader, how one responds to that failure. P7 contributed to this thought by mentioning that mid-level leaders need to make sure they understand that everything will ultimately work out in the end.

> You will survive, even if you are made incredibly uncomfortable sometimes you have to do that. Comfort and courage cannot exist at the same time, but discomfort and courage can exist. Be open to shifting how you think of things. (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016)

Lastly, P7 advised mid-level leaders to continue to seek knowledge:

> Recognize what your personal leadership style is and know that it will evolve. Additionally, don't be afraid to look outside of your own bubble to see what kind of leadership ideologies are out there so that you can be open to shifting new ideas around what it means to be a leader. (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016)

***Know limitations*.** Four instances (13.3%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P5 highlighted that once one reaches mid-level, "don't expect it to be easy or seamless" (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016). Additionally, it's important to know that as a mid-level leader, one does experience less student contact as one moves up in the field, so if having student contact is something an individual wants to continue it's worth re-examining if moving up in higher education is really the right decision. Lastly, in regard to allocating time and working with supervisees, P5 stated:

> Avoid giving away department time and resources; they are not your resources to give away even as a mid-level and your supervisees' time is not yours to give away. While you might be able to technically do it, it's in no way, shape, or form, worth the cost of staff morale in terms of what you will pay when you choose to

give away people’s time without their consent. (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Lead by example. Four instances (13.3%) of this theme were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. P3, P7, P11, and P14, encouraged aspiring mid-level leaders to model the way and treat everyone equally. Finally, P3 reminded individuals to both honor and respect the position.

Be reflective and understand the culture. Three instances (10%) for each of these themes were mentioned by the participants either directly or indirectly. In particular, P3, P6, and P7 once again highlighted the importance of finding the culture of the institution one is entering, including learning the politics. They also emphasized the importance of being reflective. Regarding being reflective, P6 said:

> Take a critical look at all of your identities, including everything you are bringing to the table and be prepared. Knowing what are the things, based on your identities that are important to you will help you in lining up as many of those as possible to your potential new environment. As a result, at work, when interacting with colleagues, supervisors, and staff there is buy-in for you to be successful in that environment, and then outside of that environment you have a place where you can comfortably retreat. (P6, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

In regard to understanding the culture, P2 cautions individuals to learn the politics of the university and what will influence or impact decisions they will make, both positively and negatively. Additionally it is important to learn to have a thick skin in certain situation and to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. The thoughts of P7 aligns with P2’s statement:

> Find the culture of that institution. Make sure to find out: what are the expectations in terms of how they collaborate with others? What are the expectations of how they are to work with people in the office? What are the expectations of how they are going to work with people outside of the office? Conversationally, getting some of those points is really helpful…find some key people on campus you can partner with that have a shared vision because that will help. (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016)

Interview question 13: Is there anything else you wish to add? Through data analysis of responses to this interview question, nine characteristics developed. From those nine characteristics, the following three themes emerged, presented here in alphabetical order: (a) build relationships, (b) be strategic, and (c) higher education is a specialty (See Figure 13).

Build relationships, be strategic, higher education is a specialty. From the final interview question, which gave interview participants an opportunity to share any last words of wisdom, the three stated themes were covered an equal instance of three times (33.3%). Additionally, two out of these three themes were reiterated from previously answered interview questions by P1, P2, P3, P5, P8, and P9. In regard to building relationships, networking, and knowing who one's supervisor will be is important. P1 noted,

> Working on a college or university campus gives you the opportunity to connect with so many people and that will serve you in your career no matter where you go because people will know you, they will know your work style, and they will know what type of position they would want you for. Find a network of support

both in and out of the institution, but network sincerely because that's what drives this field and moves it forward. (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016)

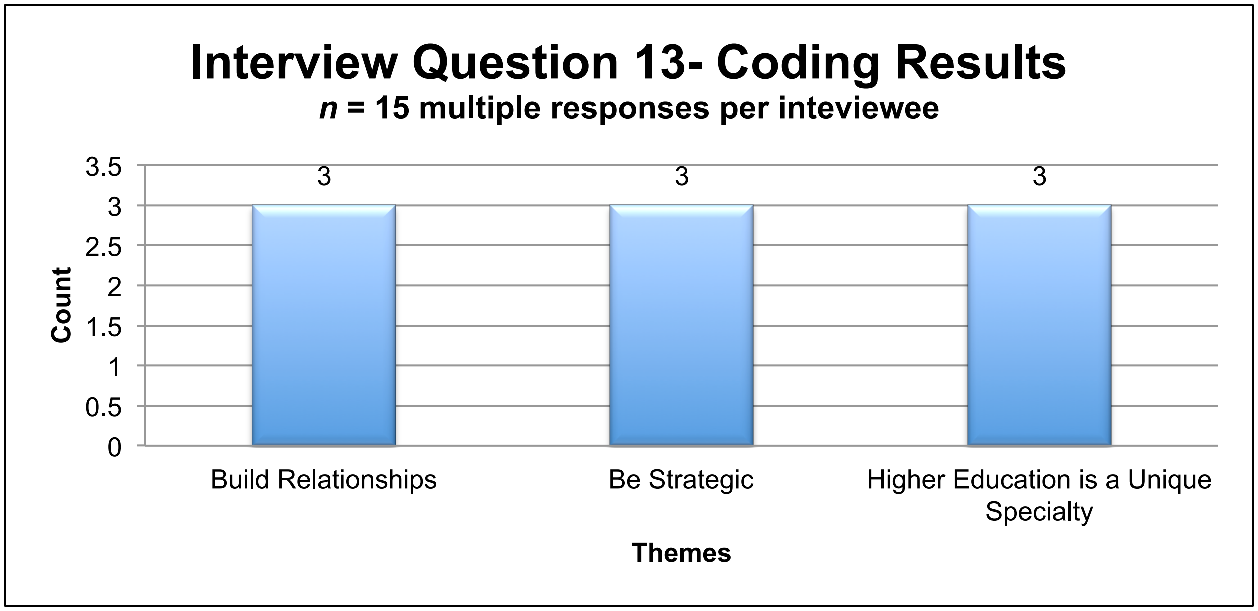

Figure 13. Optional responses to "Is there anything else you wish to add?" This figure demonstrates the three themes that have emerged from responses answering the optional stated interview question. The numbers next to each theme indicate the number of times a statement was made by an interview participant either directly or indirectly that fell into the respective category.

In reference to being strategic, P8 mentioned:

> As a mid-level leader, you are leading but you are still doing a lot of following because there are a lot of politics involved. Yet, just because something was done one way in your role in the past doesn't mean it has to be done the same way every year, especially if you have better ways to go about accomplishing the same goal. So don't be afraid to challenge the status quo, but be strategic if and when you do it. (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Lastly, in regard to higher education being a unique specialty, P3 noted:

> I think my answers would be different if we were talking about corporate America. In higher education, we are in a bubble. This is a bit different from how corporate America works, where the importance of titles does create power and determine stature in one's field. Because higher education works within a bubble, how we do business can be a barrier or a challenge, so we have to be aware of this as we walk through these roles. (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Summary of research question four. Research question four asked, What recommendations do higher education institutions make for creating successful career advancement programs? In order to answer this question, two interview questions were posed:

1. What advice or cautionary measures would you give to those aspiring to mid-level leadership positions?
2. Is there anything else you wish to add?

A total of nine themes emerged in the responses to the two interview questions associated with this research question. The nine themes are as follows: know one's limitations, be strategic, be challenged, understand the culture, be reflective, lead by example, build relationships, and higher education is a specialty.

Chapter IV Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine what higher education institutions could do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles. Fifteen mid-level leaders from various higher education institutions were recruited to become interview participants for the study. They were asked 13 semi-structured interview questions focused around the following four research questions:

1. What challenges do higher education institutions face in preparing staff for mid-level management and leadership roles?
2. What can higher education institutions do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles?
3. How do higher education institutions measure their success in preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles?
4. What recommendations do higher education institutions make for creating successful career advancement programs?

The data for this study were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The researcher and two inter-raters, current Pepperdine doctoral candidates, coded the data via content analysis. This analysis was accomplished by employing a phenomenological approach as explained previously in Chapter III. Chapter IV presented the findings related to the aforementioned four research questions, which yielded a total of 54 themes. The themes are presented again for review in Table 5. A discussion of themes, implications, recommendations, and conclusions of the study are presented in Chapter V.

Table 5

Summary of Themes for Four Research Questions

RQ1. Institutional Challenges	RQ2. Institutional Preparation	RQ3. Measurement	RQ4. Recommendations
Politics	Need for a training program	Knowing your job	Know limitations
Being a supervisor and a colleague	Transparency	Taking initiative	Be strategic
Job expectations	Resiliency and perspective	Patience	Be challenged
Managing people at different skill levels	Previous work experience	Understanding the culture	Be reflective
Lack of communication	Identifying dependable colleagues	Building relationships	Understand the culture
Behind the scenes experiences	Professional development Opportunities	Leading by example	Build relationships
Culture	Servant leadership	Assessment	Lead by example
Need for a training program	Observation	Discussions	Higher education is a unique specialty
Daily experiences	Reflection	Additional Support Structures	
Communicative efforts	Mentorship	Having end goals	
Transparency	Organization and administration	Reflection	
First 90 days	Authentic leadership	Professional Development	
Colleague relationships			
Understanding the role			
Second guessing future job roles			
Encourage big picture thinking			
Encouraged Reflection			
Encourage additional professional development			
Recognizing needed work amenities			

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

Higher education is a specialty, and being successful in the role of a mid-level leader in higher education is both an art and a science. In the field of higher education, a variety of resources are available to support individuals that may be transitioning into entry-level and senior-level leadership roles, yet there is little research on successfully transitioning individuals into mid-level leadership roles (Drew, 2010; Jones, 2009; Rosser, 2004). In order to contribute to literature in the field, this study served to contribute beneficial and advantageous knowledge to help the aspiring mid-level leader transition successfully into his/her new leadership role. Additionally, the results of this study will also offer higher education institutions additional resources to create consistent training and orientation programs that produce quality mid-level leaders that will progress the efficiency of the department and their respective institutions.

This chapter serves to discuss the conclusions and recommendations of the study. A summary of the study will be presented along with a discussion of the findings and a look at implications for various groups. Additionally, recommendations for future research will be shared and the chapter will conclude with final thoughts regarding the study.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what higher education institutions could do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles. The literature review provided the contextual background needed to create the four intentional research questions and 13 open-ended interview questions.

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, which is used to study the significance of human experiences from the perspective of the individual who lived the experience (Locke et al., 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

For the purpose of this study, mid-level leaders in higher education were defined as individuals who had obtained at least a master's degree in higher education (or a similar field), currently held a mid-level leadership role at a 4-year public or private institution, and had a basic understanding of the tenets surrounding working in higher education. Fifteen interview participants were selected by a purposive sampling approach with a maximum variation sampling in order to find shared patterns spread throughout individual experiences. This method was determined to be a valuable practice as it allowed themes to develop from heterogeneity (Isaac & Michael, 1995; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The criteria for maximum variation identification in this study included: position title, industry (public or private), geographic location, age, ethnicity, educational achievement, marital status, and family background.

To answer the four research questions, an interview protocol was developed and then validated by two Pepperdine doctoral candidates who served as inter-raters, as well as a panel of experts. Semi-structured interviews took place with 15 participants. Raw data took the form of interview transcripts, which were transcribed from audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews. To determine coding, the researcher and the two inter-rater reviewers employed inductive content analysis. Once the transcripts were coded, themes began to form. Inter-raters were important to this study as they helped strengthen the study's reliability. Results of the coding were reviewed by the researcher who then provided them to the inter-raters to review and provide suggestions and edits. The results of analyses were compared to proposed themes, which were solidified and these findings were presented in Chapter IV.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study were specifically geared toward mid-level leaders in higher education (current or aspiring) that may be transitioning into a current or future mid-level leadership role. Throughout the following sections, results of the study will be reviewed. Additionally, analysis focused further on specific themes that stood out in each respective research question and how these may relate universally to mid-level leaders.

Results for research question one. Research question one asked, What challenges do higher education institutions face in preparing staff for mid-level management and leadership roles? To answer this question, a focus was placed on institutions efficiently:

- Educating individuals on how to be a successful supervisor and a colleague, and what that would look like logistically from an institutional and departmental perspective.
- Being able to effectively communicate navigating the culture and the politics of the institution to individuals without being discouraging in regard to what one can accomplish in their new mid-level role.
- Providing a comprehensive training that will be effective for entering mid-level leaders and being able to successfully determine if the goals of that training are being met.

- Communicating that in mid-level roles, possessing resiliency and perspective is important to being successful as a new mid-level leader. Although, these traits are not something that can necessarily be taught by an institution.

For example, P4 spoke to the difficulties of overseeing a professional staff and managing the complexities of meeting staff developmental needs while still progressively meeting the overall needs of the department in tandem with the institutional needs. Schwartz and Porath (2014) state that a mid-level leader's department is served better overall when a leader takes their employees needs into account. As a result, their employees are able to bring the best of themselves to work.

Analysis of research question one. Based on the themes that emerged from this research question, with 11 instances of it (28%) mentioned within responses for its respective interview question, it was evident that being a supervisor and a colleague was one of the top challenges associated with being a mid-level leader in higher education. Individuals became aware of this challenge through daily experiences, in which they managed from the middle, providing support both above and below to supervisees and supervisors, respectively and working collaboratively with their colleagues of similar positional standing (Maxwell, 2005; Rosser, 2000).

The findings from the four interview questions address research question one. Throughout their reflective narratives, three aspects of being a supervisor and a colleague stood out from interviewee responses:

1. Feeling as though as an entering mid-level leader they had no idea what was going on to the point that they were even questioning their own abilities as a professional.

2. Supervising or interacting with individuals who are more well-versed in subject areas than them.
3. Navigating the cultural and political environment of the institution from a mid-level viewpoint.

In highlighting daily experiences, one interviewee spoke to feeling as though his/her supervisees (entry-level professionals) knew more than he/she did once he/she entered into the mid-level role. As a result, he/she did not feel equipped to lead his/her new team. Although this may seem daunting to a new mid-level leader, this experience is normal for a variety of reasons. As new, young professionals enter into the field of higher education from other arenas, such as graduate school, they are acquiring new information in classes that may have just developed over recent years as burgeoning hot topics in higher education. This information may not have been relevant when their supervisor was in their position. These topics may also still just be picking up steam amongst the general population of student affairs professionals, so of course, these topics would be more fresh on newer professionals' minds than with more seasoned supervisors. Although the new professionals one is supervising at the time may appear to be up-to-date on the more recent developments in the field, this knowledge is not elusive; it just means that, as a mid-level leader and a supervisor, one should adopt a proactive approach in terms of professional development to become up-to-date on current professional topics.

Furthermore, understanding that topics of relevance differ amongst colleges and universities also plays a part in having a new leader feel as though everyone on the new campus knows a secret and they don't. As relevant topics vary from campus to campus and one transitions from old to new settings as a mid-level leader, needs and response levels to different topics vary; a leader will become used to these ebbs and flows only with time and knowledge. For example, if a professional is transitioning from a campus that had a high occurrence of student conduct issues to a campus with very few student conduct issues, needs and response levels of the mid-level leader will look very different for interacting with professionals and students on that campus based on the culture of the institution (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). These findings extend previous research, which found that as an entering mid-level leader, one has to embrace the change, ask relevant questions to get *dialed in* to the campus, and know that it will get better with time (Rosser, 2000). Thoughts of inadequacy as a new mid-level leader will fade away.

Additionally, one should remind oneself to be comfortable knowing that one doesn't always have to know everything as a supervisor, which is the mark of a successful leader. In particular, successful leaders need to "be comfortable with not having all the right answers, know how to ask the right questions, solicit input broadly and transparently, and report back findings in a way that builds trust" (Fusch, 2011, p. 10).

Results for research question two. Research question two asked, What can higher education institutions do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles? To answer this question, a focus was placed on institutions successfully:

- Creating a comprehensive training program tailored toward mid-level leaders with a focus on various leadership and transitional topics.

- Being transparent in their communication and expectations of mid-level leaders from a departmental and institutional perspective.
- Providing opportunities for professional development.
- Encouraging individuals to develop relationships with one another to increase the morale and productivity of the institution, and communicating the importance of relationship building through offerings such as mentorship opportunities.

For example, P1 spoke to the need for a comprehensive training for mid-level leaders regardless if they are new to a mid-level role, moving laterally from another mid-level role, or the mid-level role in question is brand new to the institution with no previous history. Not only should the individuals holding new mid-level roles receive training, they should receive an institutional mentor as well. Benefits of these mentorship opportunities, from an institutional perspective, include but are not limited to stronger employees offering higher levels of performance, increased connectivity and morale, and palpable support to the mid-level leader onboarding program (Penner, 2001).

Analysis of research question two. Based on the themes that emerged from this research question, it was determined that the findings from the four interview questions asked did address research question two. With two instances (13%) of this theme mentioned, it was evident that having a comprehensive training/onboarding program in place for all new mid-level leaders is vital to ensuring their successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles (Bauer, 2010). Interview participants overcame the challenges mentioned in IQ1 through employing knowledge from previous work experiences, relying on their resiliency and perspective, and using their organizational and administrative skills.

Throughout their reflective narratives, three aspects of the importance of a training/onboarding program tailored toward mid-level leaders stood out from interviewees' responses:

1. Trainings and professional development opportunities are needed, as being a mid-level leader and the responsibilities that come with that role can be daunting if not approached correctly. Additionally, as a mid-level leader there are more opportunities to experience legal issues within higher education based on the action or nonaction of one's leadership.
2. Ideas that seem intuitive sometimes have to be stated explicitly through a traditional sit-down training.
3. Having a consistent mentorship program will afford the new mid-level leader the opportunity to get connected to the institution faster and allow them to touch base on relevant topics taking place on campus, including determining actions to best approach them.

These findings extend previous research as at its core. Training and onboarding serve the purpose of providing a crash course on what it means to work at an institution by guiding individuals from being organizational outsiders to becoming organizational insiders (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). However, most formal, comprehensive training programs, as previously described, resemble standard employee orientations that are primarily led by Human Resources departments and predominantly discuss employee benefits, such as dental insurance and filling out W-2 forms (Bauer, 2010). There are few educational components to such offerings. Based on the results of this study, to equip mid-level professionals with the tools needed to have a successful transition into their roles, the researcher suggests that topics focused on areas such as leadership development and theories, institutional politics, and overall campus and student culture be discussed. These topics serve as the key aspects of a campus community and would provide invaluable insight to employees. Options for learning these topics can come in the form of seminars, workshops, or Q&A panels, for example, and be offered over the course of several weeks for better knowledge retention, as “programs packaged like a mini-certificate are much more effective than one-off offerings or events” (Fusch, 2011, p. 14).

Actively and intentionally employing a mentorship program between current and new employees may help develop relationships and increase or maintain high communication efforts on one’s campus. This suggestion comes from mentorship being evidenced in the list of themes that emerged from research question two. However, in order to employ a mentorship component to onboarding and professional development on campus, this component must have an explicit direction and purpose for its existence in order for people to buy into it. The most successful methods for mentorship programs at the institutional level encompass a cohort approach that is “both cross-functional and representative of different generations and degrees of experience”(Fusch, 2011, p. 14).

Leaders in higher education engage in many instances of *learning by doing*, in which one learns how to handle an experience by just jumping in and navigating through it. However, what if there was a training to prepare these mid-level leaders for possible scenarios before they happened, in which they walked through the scenarios in a safe environment with colleagues of equal stature to process through it? Providing capacity building within these trainings and mentorship programs allows individuals to "work together to conduct the necessary research and identify the resources that will be needed to confront a given challenge" (Fusch, 2011, p. 14). As a result, in responding to an actual concern on campus regarding a student or departmental staff, that response would be more refined, decisive, and executed effectively to provide the right amount of support to the individuals in need.

Results for research question three. Research question three asked, How do higher education institutions measure their success in preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles? To answer this question, a focus was placed on institutions successfully employing assessment and reflection tactics to gauge a pulse on the campus climate; these tactics could be in the form of formal mid-year and annual surveys, focus groups, and informal conversations, for example. P13 stated that implementing pre- and post surveys would allow institutions to engage in productive conversations amongst departments and colleagues to better determine how to hold intentional conversations with departing and entering employees. As a result, these conversations will highlight the hopes of new mid-level leaders entering into the institutions. Additionally, areas where the institution flourished in providing support and resources to departing employees and areas where they could have done better for future implementation will be highlighted as well (Rosser et al., 2003).

Analysis of research question three. Based on the themes that emerged from this research question, it was determined that the findings from the three interview questions asked did answer research question three. With eight instances (50%) of it being mentioned, it was evident that assessment was the key component interview participants discussed in order for institutions to effectively measure their success at preparing staff for successful mid-level management and leadership roles. Interview participants emphasized the importance of knowing their job and employing personal reflection to assist in their own benchmarking and tracking of their success. Throughout their reflective narratives, two aspects of assessment stood out from interview participant responses. Employing more frequent institutional assessments may achieve the following:

1. Allow institutions to have a better understanding of the campus climate, including the thoughts and feelings of employees, and allow for more opportunities to be proactive in meeting the needs of staff. These efforts in the beginning will pay off when looking to recruit future mid-level leaders to an institution for employment and in assisting in their onboarding and training.
2. Encourage new and current staff to take a reflective look at their progress on a more regular basis and encourage them to keep working toward the best possible version of themselves as mid-level leaders based on personal reflection and feedback from staff (Barling & Kelloway, 2000; Greenleaf & Spears, 2002).

Assessment measures can take the form of written evaluations, surveys, one-on-one meetings, and/or focus groups, for example. In order to develop and advance, regardless of the format, it is important for institutional and mid-level leaders to seek honest feedback regularly. Institutions (e.g., Human Resources departments) working with their mid-level leaders to create a leadership assessment that asks three basic, but very effective questions, about one’s leadership will help one know what strategies to keep employing as a new mid-leader in one’s department and what areas of leadership to course correct.

These findings extend previous research, as Sanaghan and Eberbach (2013) suggested the following three questions for mid-level leaders to ask their teams periodically:

- What are my five greatest strengths as a leader?
- What is one area of needed development I should be aware of and conscious about?
- What is one piece of advice you would like to provide me that would help me in my current role?

Staff should answer these questions anonymously. Upon receiving all responses, the mid-level leader should sit down with his/her direct supervisor in a one-on-one meeting and review the results, in which he/she has an honest dialogue and reflective time for how he/she is progressing in his/her new role with the supervisor’s support. These findings extend previous research regarding introspection methods with one’s direct supervisor. Sanaghan and Eberbach (2013) suggested that prior to or during such meetings, mid-level leaders reflect on questions such as:

- What challenges am I encountering?
- What questions seem to come up repeatedly?
- What is the *pulse* of my team? How are they feeling? How are they performing?
- What is going well? What do I need to be appreciative of?

- What are other leaders in my organization talking about? Worried about? Excited about?

By employing these effective assessment measures, there is a higher probability for a successful year of transition for a new mid-level leader within his/her respective department. Regular assessment allows the institution as a whole to examine the effectiveness and progress of each of their campus departments to gauge institutional progress as they continue to work toward the institution's mission, vision, and goals. Additionally, this level of being proactive allows for individuals within the campus community to witness that intentional effort has gone into meeting the basic needs of employees in order to be successful in their respective roles.

Results for research question four. Research question four asked, What recommendations do higher education institutions make for creating successful career advancement programs? To answer this question, a focus was placed on institutions being reflective and strategic, knowing limitations, and understanding the true culture of their institution. For example, P3 indicated that titles create barriers. Individuals should remain cognizant of how they use their titles in an educational setting. In times when a title would help in pushing an agenda forward, it can be used beneficially; but just using a title to demonstrate power over an individual will reduce one's credibility and trust as a leader. As such, it is important that institutions effectively communicate this common mistake made by new mid-level leaders within their career advancement programs (Guinn, 2000).

Analysis of research question four. It was determined that the findings from the two interview questions asked did answer research question four. Primarily, it is imperative to be strategic in terms of what the mid-level leadership program will look like from start to finish. Considerations for this program should include, but not be limited to the following: (a) placing a focus on new mid-level leaders building relationships on campus, (b) having a solid understanding of the culture of the institution and how individual roles contribute to that culture, (c) educating entering leaders on the limitations of their individual mid-level roles, and (d) reflection and assessment opportunities incorporated throughout their employment at the institution.

In regard to limitations and relationships, leading a team is a privilege. As an institution it is important to make clear to these individuals that being a mid-level leader affords one the autonomy to lead a team of professionals the best way one sees fit, while keeping aligned with the goals of this institution. However, at the same time, there are many decisions that are not made by mid-level leaders that may directly or indirectly affect one's organization and at times one may feel powerless. Mid-level leaders should not be alarmed by this component of the job, and instead should strive to embrace it.

Positive relationship building should always be encouraged to foster harmonious and high-performing environments. As higher education is all about relationship building, it is the obligation of an institution and its employees to practice what it preaches. These findings extend previous research. As an institution, and more specifically as a supervisor of a new mid-level leader, "The supervisor needs to help the transitioning leader develop the interpersonal relationships they will need in others to work with others successfully" (Sanaghan & Lohndorf, 2015, p. 32). As beginnings are important, it is vital to get these experiences right the first time. The best way to have someone, such as a mid-level leader, feel welcomed and supported within a new institution is through these opportunities of establishing relationships with colleagues and campus partners. For supervisors, this can be taking their mid-leader to meet key individuals on campus with whom they will be interacting frequently, for example. Positive campus relationships create positive people, positive people maintain a positive morale in the culture of their institution, and a positive morale and culture of an institution lead to great service. As a result, that great service is then passed down to the most important relationship on campus: the relationship with the students.

Implications of the Study

As the study began to conclude, it was evident that many implications from it will benefit aspiring or current professionals in higher education who wish to transition to mid-level leadership. In particular, the findings from this study can serve as advantageous guidelines for new (current or aspiring) mid-level leaders who are looking to transition successfully into a new or different mid-level leadership role. In addition, it can offer guidelines for higher education institutions to consider in determining how to best support entering mid-level leaders on their individual campuses. To transition into a new role successfully and lead a high performing team, the study's findings are consistent with current theories in the field in regard to leading from the middle (Flanders, 2008); employing leadership theories, such as transformational and situational leadership (Hersey, 1984; Judge & Piccolo, 2004); and practicing emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990), for example. Additionally these findings are consistent with theoretical frameworks such as Kotter's (2001) Eight-Step Change Model and Covey's (2006) 13 behaviors for building trust as a leader and employing new initiatives under one's leadership.

Implications for aspiring or current mid-level leaders. Within the study, an intentional question was asked of interview participants regarding advice and/or cautionary measures they could provide to future mid-level leaders. The goal of this question was to create a comprehensive list of guidelines to serve as a takeaway from this study for immediate implementation by aspiring mid-level leaders. Anticipating the popularity of this question, the number of multiple in-depth responses received in that section alone was handsomely expansive. The advice and knowledge provided by the interview participants were poignant and widely applicable. Additionally, from responses provided for the remaining 12 questions, several key statements emerged that were also considered beneficial advice for leaders. These reflections were amalgamated into the following framework.

- *Find your person(s)*: Talk to and get advice from mid-level leaders and managers currently in the field; find people you can reach out to within each department at your institution (P2, personal communication, March 4, 2016). This practice can be in the form of basic networking to get to know current mid-level leaders at one's institution and the role that the individual plays on campus. This role also includes how that current mid-level leader will interact with the new mid-level leader throughout the academic year or this networking can be in the form of a formal mentoring relationship. The mentorship between new and current mid-level leaders would be initiated by these individuals on their own and could provide great benefits to both parties. For the mentor, these benefits include, but are not limited to the following: personal satisfaction through seeing someone else succeed, innovative ideas created due to a different perspective brought in by the new mid-level leader, and the possibility for friendship between the two individuals (Penner, 2001). The benefits for the new mid-level leader include adapting more quickly to their role and institution, increasing one’s experience to ideas and connections, and possible friendship with the current mid-level leader as well (Penner, 2001).

- *Embrace the mindset*: Start now, and even if you are not already in the role, think like a mid-level leader now (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016).
- *Save up, peace of mind is invaluable*: For housing live-in professionals, save as much money as you possibly can when you are living-in before accepting a mid-level leadership role that requires you to live off-campus (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016).
- *Exercise restraint*: Don’t take the first shiny thing (i.e., mid-level position) that comes along; make sure it’s truly the right fit and that you are choosing it for the right reasons (P6, personal communication, March 7, 2016). As a prospective mid-level leader, Taub & McEwen (2006) suggest that when searching for a new role one consider if their personal short and long-term goals and values align with their potential new institution. Additionally, when meeting with potential colleagues and supervisees during the campus interview process, one should feel as though they are able to connect with these individuals. Lastly, there should be assurance that the resources needed to be successful in the potential mid-level role will be available to the

new individual, and that there are realistic expectations set by the institution and the supervisor for the new mid-level leader of what is expected out of him or her, for example (Taub & McEwen, 2006).

- *Don't wallow in the past; honor the old and welcome the new*: Every institution is different; learn to appreciate it (P1, personal communication, March 2, 2016).
- *Know your institution*: Learn the culture of the institution. Learn the culture of your department and find out the leadership style of your department (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016). As organizational culture is an important environmental condition that affects all departments of an institution (Van Patten, 2000), it is important that as a mid-level leader one understand that the role they play at their institution is exhibited through their actions and leadership, while their employees contribute in developing the organizational culture, which is the work environment (Van Patten, 2000). Understanding the institutional culture early in the transitional process will allow the new mid-level leader to recognize how to utilize their strengths to contribute their leadership style to their department or assist in creating new initiatives for the institution that positively enhances the culture. However, most importantly learning the culture of an institution as quickly as possible assists in reducing the amount of time it takes one to acclimate into their new environment (Van Patten, 2000).
- *Take responsibility and be patient*: You are responsible for your transition. Start organizing your game plan before your start date. Who are the key

players to whom you should reach out on campus? What are pressing issues that need immediate attention? Your first year is your learning year. Be patient with yourself (P4, personal communication, March 7, 2016). Watkins (2013) suggests that individuals have a plan in place for the first 90 days within their new position in order to have a successful transition. Methods to effectively plan for the first 90 days include but are not limited to establishing a list of colleagues to connect with to begin building an in-house network, and asking consistent and relevant questions from employees to understand how best to meet their work styles and needs while learning the culture of the department. Additionally, gathering as much information about what has been done in the past from either written documentation or long-term employees to understand how one's mid-level role has interacted with the institution in the past will assist the new mid-level leader in planning how they would like to see their position progress in the future (Watkins, 2013).

- *Actions make the leader, not the title*: Titles create barriers. Recognize when using the title is to your benefit, but also be aware of times when it could be to your detriment. Plan accordingly (P3, personal communication, March 7, 2016).
- *Take a look at your reflection*: Determine who you are as a leader. What is your leadership style and what type of team are you leading? Be adaptable (P8, personal communication, March 11, 2016). Goleman and Boyatzis (2002) state that the most successful leaders understand how to utilize a combination of leadership styles to effectively lead one's team and interact

with employees. By understanding one's strengths, having a clear vision, modeling transformational leadership, and being authentic to oneself there is a higher probability for success as a new mid-level leader.

- *Have an outlet*: Find a cohort and peer group outside of the people you supervise (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016).
- *Accept the challenge and be a Sherlock:* Comfort and courage cannot exist at the same time, but discomfort and courage can exist. Be open to shifting how you think about things. Develop the ability to find out the answer to *why* without asking the question *Why?* Be strategic (P7, personal communication, March 10, 2016).
- *Save yourself*: Guard your reputation well. Do this by meeting deadlines, planning ahead, being successful, aspiring to greatness, and being passionate about it. Lead by example (P9, personal communication, March 14, 2016).
- *Check yourself*: Avoid making promises and saying anything absolute, especially when you are representing your institution in any fashion (P5, personal communication, March 7, 2016).
- *Have fun, get involved*: Being involved is important. Whether you are involved in university-wide committees, faculty/staff committees, associations on campus, or regional, state, or national associations. You will be a better mid-level leader because of it (P9, personal communication, March 14, 2016).
- *Enter ready to leave*: Don't become complacent; have an exit plan. Determine when you will know you are ready to move on (P3, personal communication,

March 7, 2016). Ideally, one should job search when they are happy in their current role, as the search would now be rooted in the individuals *want* for a new role and not a *need* for a new role (Blimling, 2002). Reasons that one may want to consider a new role include but are not limited to an impromptu job opportunity possibly not being available when one does begin to formally job search in the future. Additionally, one would also be in a better position to negotiate future salary and benefits since by already having a job the individual would have more influence with the institution that wants to hire them (Blimling, 2002).

Implications for higher education institutions. In addition to professionals in higher education, this study was conducted with higher education institutions in mind. Institutions should consider the results of the study when determining the effective initiatives that can be implemented to facilitate the success of current or entering mid-level leaders. Although all aspects of this study are noteworthy, from an institutional perspective, recommendations to use as takeaways are as follows.

***Training programs for mid-level leaders*.** Overwhelmingly, throughout this study, a piece of advice repeatedly brought up by interview participants to support mid-level leaders at their institution was to provide a training/onboarding program specifically for mid-level leaders. The format of such a program can be up to the individual institution to fit its culture, but, at minimum, the program should be geared toward individuals coming into a new mid-level leadership role, regardless of years of experience in higher education or if the person is an internal hire. To maintain consistency, tracking progress/success of mid-level employees from the beginning is essential.

Additionally, a session should be dedicated specifically to having an honest discussion about the general politics of the institution and how those may affect one's individual area. Depending on the comfort level, this topic can be discussed one-on-one, as a group, or as a hybrid between the two, but the topic must be reviewed. Having this level of transparency is critical for a new mid-level leader.

Furthermore, institutions should consider employing a two-track onboarding feature once the initial onboarding program has been implemented successfully for at least 4 years. Four years for implementation of the initial onboarding program is suggested, as the first year would be a pilot year to try it out and address any problems. The second year allows the institution to implement the new changes based on assessment of the first year. The third year allows for additional fine-tuning. By the fourth year, it should be a well-oiled machine, working fluidly with few issues, if the results from assessment are implemented effectively.

Mentorship opportunities. Many institutions have mentorship programs that are tailored solely toward new employees joining the institution. It is suggested that the mentorship component be either stand-alone or preferably part of the suggested training program for professionals entering into new mid-level roles, regardless of years of service. If a role is new to an individual, he/she should receive a mentor. How long the mentorship lasts depends on the institution, but it should at least be a yearlong (1 academic year) mentorship. One academic year is suggested because the first year of taking on a new mid-level role in higher education is always the learning year. It will take

1 full school year to learn all of the components of the new mid-level role and how it interacts with the campus and outside community; subsequent years then become cyclical.

Creating a culture packet (updated yearly). It is suggested that in conjunction with the campus institutional research office or similar and the Human Resources department, a yearly campus culture packet geared to all hires, but with the mid-level leader in mind, be created. This packet will provide a snapshot of what the culture truly looks like and provide transparency for the new leader on what to expect when interacting with individuals in a particular area or department on campus. This campus culture packet can be as in depth as having a culture profile for each department on the campus, or a general, but still detailed, culture assessment of the campus as a whole. This packet should include, but not be limited to the following: commonly understood unspoken rules, abbreviations used to describe locations on campus, and/or descriptive explanations on specific parts of the year that are particularly more active for the campus (e.g., during homecoming, before finals, holiday breaks, etc.). A well-written document should make an individual feel like he/she knows the majority of insider information, somewhat mimicking an end of year report, but for the entire campus community. It is anticipated that there will be a substantial amount of work in the beginning to get this initiative going, but once it is active, yearly updating to the report will more than likely be significantly less taxing.

Establishing an institutional mid-level leader support network. As mid-level leadership is a relatively small field in higher education, it is suggested that an additional support structure be put in place on college and university campuses to provide all mid-level leaders of their institution a space and time that allows them to touch base, debrief, and connect about issues or ideas related to the role of a mid-level leader in particular. This effort may come in the form of sharing best practices, discussing initiatives taking place in one's respective area, exploring potential cross-departmental collaborative opportunities, and touching base on how each leader and his/her team is working to foster the mission and goals of the campus. Additionally, having a safe space to bounce ideas off people and to not feel alone would benefit this population of leaders. Mid-level leadership can be a thankless job and, as mentioned previously in the findings section, an isolating one as well. Connecting with other mid-level leaders at the institution just to *come up for air* and know that one is not alone can serve as a powerful motivator and increase the morale of the campus staff.

Ongoing professional development opportunities for mid-level leaders**.** The need for additional professional development opportunities was echoed in responses related to three out of the four research questions. It is suggested that a clear professional development plan be implemented within higher education institutions, if one is not in place already, that seeks to develop the individual based on his/her needs. This plan can be determined by employing a mid-level leader needs assessment at the end of every academic year. Employing a needs assessment at the end of the academic year serves two purposes:

1. It is a strategic time placement for a survey to capture the desired professional development opportunities of staff, as it will be easier for them to recall thoughts and information after just participating in a full school year of professional development opportunities.

2. Based on the requested desires, doing so affords the appropriate department (e.g., Human Resources) ample time to begin brainstorming and planning the professional development calendar for the next academic year. Implementing this survey in the month of April, for example, will allow time for individuals to focus on it, and for the data seeker to gather as many responses as possible versus employing the assessment in May, where it may be easily overlooked due to being one of the busiest times of the academic year.

Having standing professional development sessions in place will give leaders something to look forward to and let them know that there is a reliable source of additional professional development available for them on campus. These standing sessions could take place every other week on a Friday, for example, or at minimum, once a month. Furthermore, these professional development opportunities could focus on themes that appear during particular times throughout the year that need special attention (e.g., approaching student mental health issues, or establishing one's team at the beginning of each academic year). It is also recommended that they consist of topics such as: (a) various leadership development and theories (e.g., situational and authentic leadership), (b) how to lead, and (c) how to supervise.

Assessments. It is highly recommended to have an institutional assessment practice in place, such as focus groups or campus climate surveys, to track and benchmark the implementation of the aforementioned initiatives. For example, the training/onboarding program should be assessed at the midway point of the academic year to determine how employees are doing 6 months into the role. At the end of the academic year there should be another check-in with employees at the 10-12 month period. Furthermore, it is suggested that a brief assessment should take place once a year with the mid-level leaders in particular to again gauge how they are doing but also ask them, What is keeping you here at the institution? What is making you consider leaving? Or what is putting you on the fence? As an institution, being aware of these thought processes at 6 months, 12 months, and annual check points will allow for proactive proper course correction or additional measures to be put into place to ensure that support is being offered as best as possible to staff and show investment in their success.

Required administrative manual for each department. These manuals will serve as a general comprehensive resource guide related to the specific department into which a mid-level leader will enter; because of its comprehensive nature this is the one resource that anyone within his/her respective department can refer to, as the message communicated will be the same for all. Individual roles will receive a small version of guidelines related specifically to their job position in addition to this manual. These manuals will be a compendium of all knowledge related to the respective department including: administrative policies, emergency response procedures, campus directory, most used administrative forms, how to perform various universal tasks related to working in the specific department, etc. Manuals such as these are invaluable to maintain consistency within a department and serve as a reference point when encountering times of confusion about any policies that may arise. In essence, if constructed successfully, anyone could come into a department, read the manual and be ready to work at approximately a 75 to 80% performance level, referencing it when needed. Manuals such as these will serve tremendously valuable in starting the entering mid-level leader off on the right foot due to having all of the departmental preliminary knowledge in his/her toolbox.

Fiscal impact considerations. When examining the fiscal impact of institutional implications, it is important to consider the cost of turnover and loss of talent due to poor preparation, as well as the cost of executing the aforementioned suggestions. In particular, regular training programs, ongoing professional development opportunities, and administering assessments will contribute to the majority of institutional onboarding costs for new mid-level leaders. In regard to regular training and ongoing professional development opportunities for current mid-level leaders, annual institutional budget allowances would need to be set aside for resources such as webinars, travel to conferences (e.g. registration costs, food, lodging, etc.), or purchase of professional development books for staff, for example. The amount of funds set aside for these professional development opportunities would need to be determined on a departmental, divisional and/or institutional level. In reference to cost of turnover and loss of talent due to poor preparation, annual budget allocations would need to be set aside for considerations such as employee search processes, marketing, attending job placement conferences, allocation of staff time to conduct interviews, and paying for on campus interview opportunities for potential employees (e.g. flight, food, lodging, etc).

When considering assessment practices, determining as an institution if an assessment instrument should be created by the institution to gather data or if utilizing an outside agency to complete this task instead will be important. For example, employing an outside organization to implement an institutional campus climate survey would better streamline and analyze data received from the campus body but will also be more expensive monetarily compared to an institution creating a campus climate survey of their own.

Yet, if an institution creates a survey on their own it may be more expensive in the context of time and resources needing to be allocated by current staff to complete collection and analysis of institutional data. For example, staff time allocated to this survey initiative could take away from employee work efforts in their respective departments and possibly effect departmental efficiency for a designated period of time. Therefore, as a department, division, or institution, an analysis would need to occur to weigh the pros and cons of both of these options to determine the most efficient use of funds when considering what preferences to employ for conducting assessments in one's respective area.

Study Conclusion

Considering the stated implications for new mid-level leaders and institutions assisting in the new mid-level leader's transition, it is important to reflect on the problem that currently exists in the field of higher education and the potential solutions to consider in remedying this concern. In higher education, there are three tiers of professionals: entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level leaders. Entry-level leaders are typically individuals migrating from a master's level graduate program into their first professional role in higher education, or individuals who are transitioning into the field of higher education from a different occupation. This tier of professional often receives an ample amount of training within their institutional departments to be successful within their first year at a new institution, in particular those that work in the department of Housing and Residence Life, for example. Additionally, there are significant external opportunities to assist these individuals in transitioning into their new roles successfully such as conferences, webinars, and institutes, for example.

For senior-level leaders, these individuals possess the previous experience of being an entry-level and mid-level leader and understanding the complexities it took to thrive in those roles. As such, one is able to employ those experiences as transferable skills to transition into a new senior-level position. Furthermore, professionals within this tier have established networks of colleagues and varied opportunities for professional development such as conference, webinars, and academies to assist them in their roles as well. Yet, for mid-level leaders, these individuals are not afforded as many opportunities for development within or outside of their institution compared to their counterparts. This is a problem as mid-level leaders contribute substantially to the operation of an institution in which they lead from the middle overseeing entry-level professionals to work toward accomplishing departmental goals. Additionally, mid-level leaders work in tandem with senior-level leaders to communicate the overall mission and vision of the university and move forward larger institutional goals. Therefore, for these individuals to experience lack of training and/or additional preparation opportunities to be successful in one’s role serves as a disservice to the mid-level leader, his or her departmental/divisional team, and their institution as a whole. As such, from this study, following are eight aspects that should be considered in preparing individuals for successful transition into a new mid-level leadership role:

1. Being a supervisor and a colleague within a mid-level position.
2. Understanding the culture of a new institution.
3. Effectively communicating institutional politics.

4. Need for a mid-level training program.
5. Individual, departmental, and institutional assessments.
6. Being strategic as a mid-level leader.
7. Building relationships as a mid-level leader.
8. Understanding that higher education is a unique specialty.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this research has revealed and contributed beneficial knowledge to the field of higher education, there are still opportunities available for future research focused on this topic. Based on the research findings, listed subsequently are recommendations for future study regarding mid-level leaders and successful transition periods.

1. Conduct a similar study, but consider including mid-level leaders at community colleges and/or internationally.
2. Expand the population to include mid-level managers in a corporate environment and compare/contrast the themes that emerge from both.
3. Conduct a similar study, but examine the setting from a quantitative viewpoint.
4. Focus on mid-level leaders transitioning into senior-level leadership roles and explore what successful transition initiatives would look like.
5. Consider how the results of this study could transfer into a full, stand-alone program for mid-level leaders at the institutional, regional, and national levels of higher education.

6. Consider this study in the context of creating a leadership framework model that may be focused on the factors of attitudes, skills, and knowledge in the work environment and how they would translate into pillars of mid-level leadership such as leading people, collaborative leadership, strategic leadership, and stewardship.
7. Consider this study in the context of role-specific competencies to drive results, build relationships, and manage people.
8. Focus on this study in the context of an individual employing leadership through followership while transitioning into a new role and how this method of leadership contributes to departmental and institutional short-term and/or long-term effectiveness.

Final Thoughts

This study was of particular interest as the researcher has seen instances of stellar onboarding methods as well as less than stellar onboarding methods, recognizing how both affect the performance of the mid-level leader and the morale of one's team. Additionally, as stated in the findings individuals have entered into mid-level roles thinking it was going to be one way but to their surprise that couldn't have been further from the truth, so it was important to bring both of those experiences to light. Although many challenges come with working as a mid-level leader in higher education, equal amounts of benefits also emerge from working in the field as a mid-level leader. As such, additional focus needed to be placed on this particular professional group that plays such a critical part in the successful operation of a college or university environment.

In this field, higher education practitioners spend substantial time developing programs for new professionals, as well as recognizing seasoned professionals, but what happens with those individuals in the middle? They are not quite one and not quite the other, which contributes to the lack of expansive information on mid-level research as compared to other areas of varying professional levels in higher education. Due to a passion for this area, it is anticipated that the researcher will conduct future expanded studies on this topic to continue contributing literature and best practice initiatives to the field of higher education. These studies will be aimed particularly at those who are often overlooked, but never forgotten: mid-level leaders.

Thank you to all interview participants who took part in this study to contribute to making it a success. The invaluable information taken from the honest accounts of all participants is now etched forever in writing and will contribute to the literature of leadership in higher education for years to come.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Notice

PEPPERDINE

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 12, 2016

Protocol Investigator Name: Erica Little

Protocol #: 15-12-152

Project Title: PREPARING FUTURE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXCELLENCE PRACTICES FROM STAFF TO MID-LEVEL MANAGEMENT ROLE TRANSITIONS Note: The participants of the Excellence and Innovation Project, in conjunction and with approval of their committee members wrote their first three chapters in past tense, including Chapter 3. Although the chapter was written in the past tense, the doctoral candidates understand that they are not to conduct their research until IRB approval is attained.

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Erica Little:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chairperson

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Interview Question 1: What have been some important challenges (spoken or unspoken) you have run into as a mid-level leader in higher education?

Interview Question 2: How did you become aware of or experienced these challenges?

Interview Question 3: What parts of your transition into mid-level management were more difficult (e.g., first month, 60 days, etc.)?

Interview Question 4: To what extent did these challenges impact your career path?

Interview Question 5: How could your institution have better prepared you for the challenges you described earlier?

Interview Question 6: What in your own previous training and preparation assisted you in overcoming these challenges?

Interview Question 7: What resources are or can be made available by your institution to better prepare you for a more successful transition into a mid-level leader role?

Interview Question 8: What positive leadership techniques and methods have worked in defining your mid-level position and leadership style in the department you lead?
Follow up: Mentoring, shadowing, coaching, more education, etc.

Interview Question 9: How would you personally describe the elements of a successful transition to mid-level management?

Interview Question 10: How could these elements be measured and tracked by the institution to ensure a successful transition to mid-level management?

Interview Question 11: As a mid-level leader, what methods did YOU employ to benchmark and track your own progress and success as you prepared for and transitioned into your new position?

Interview Question 12: What advice or cautionary measures would you give to those aspiring to mid-level leadership positions?

Interview Question 13: Is there anything else you wish to add?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

PREPARING FUTURE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXCELLENCE PRACTICES FROM STAFF TO MID-LEVEL MANAGEMENT ROLE TRANSITIONS

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Erica Sherese Little, M.S. and Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D at Pepperdine University, because you are defined as a mid-level leader at a higher education institution in the field of student affairs. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine what higher education institutions can do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles successfully. This purpose will be achieved by identifying successes and challenges that current mid-level leaders at higher education institutions have experienced while transitioning into their current roles, and examining how they were able to successfully employ their leadership and navigate pitfalls in their new mid-level leadership positions.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

1. Review the provided interview questions.
2. Review the informed consent form.
3. Answer the 13 qualitative interview questions.
4. Review and approve your responses to the interview questions after your responses have been transcribed.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study include no more than minimal risks.

Possible risks/harm applicable to the subjects in the study include, but are not limited to the following: Potential Breach of Confidentiality; Serious - legal, psychological and social consequences that are real if there was a breach of confidentiality; Coercion based upon the relationship of the PI to the subject; Relationship between employer and employee if study being conducted in the workplace; Loss of Self Esteem; Self-Efficacy; Boredom; Fatigue; and Negative Self Reflection.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants as this is a qualitative study, your responses will be used as data for a doctoral dissertation focusing on leadership development for mid-level leaders in higher education institutions. Additionally, this information will help in educating future mid-level leaders in successfully transitioning from an entry-level role into a mid-level leadership role within a student affairs department.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored on a password-protected computer in the principal investigator's place of residence. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years. The data collected will be transcribed and coded by for validity and reliability purposes. Upon an initial coding taking place, the data will then be provided to two carefully selected doctoral peer reviewers with a similar amount of training and preparation for conducting qualitative research. They will also code the information based on what they hear from the audio interview. Their coding will be used as comparison to the researcher to ensure the accuracy of what is interpreted from your provided commentary. Upon concluding the data gathering, this information will be provided to the principal investigator and any evidence deleted from their computers. You will then be provided a copy of the transcribed notes and coding to verify the information determined from the recordings. Upon your approval this information will be used all or in part of the findings section of the dissertation.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items which you feel comfortable.

EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures, you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Farzin Madjidi, if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

APPENDIX D

Interview Recruitment Script

Hi <Potential Subject Name>,

My name is Erica Little. I am a doctoral candidate within the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am currently working on my dissertation entitled PREPARING FUTURE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXCELLENCE PRACTICES FROM STAFF TO MID-LEVEL MANAGEMENT ROLE TRANSITIONS.

The purpose of this study is to determine what higher education institutions can do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles successfully. This study consists of 13 open-ended interview questions that will focus on identifying successes and challenges that current mid-level leaders at higher education institutions have experienced while transitioning into their current roles, and examining how they were able to successfully employ their leadership and navigate pitfalls in their new mid-level leadership positions.

I am seeking out participants to help me in this qualitative research study. Based upon careful research of qualifying factors, for those eligible to participate in the study, I have determined that you would be a great match as an interview participant. The interview will take approximately 45-60 mins and will be conducted in-person at a location of your choosing.

Would you be interested in participating?

If yes, <Interviewer will inform the participant of next steps- determining interview time and meeting location>:

Thank you, what will follow next is setting an interview date, time, and location. Approximately one week before the interview, I will provide you a copy of the interview questions for review.

If no, <Express Thanks>

Thank you for your time and your consideration. Have a great day!

APPENDIX E

Sample Reminder Email

HI <Potential Subject Name>,

This email serves as a friendly reminder in regard to previous communication I provided you regarding my dissertation study. I am currently working on my dissertation entitled PREPARING FUTURE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXCELLENCE PRACTICES FROM STAFF TO MID-LEVEL MANAGEMENT ROLE TRANSITIONS.

The purpose of this study is to determine what higher education institutions can do to prepare staff for successful transition into mid-level management and leadership roles successfully. This study consists of 13 open-ended interview questions that will focus on identifying successes and challenges that current mid-level leaders at higher education institutions have experienced while transitioning into their current roles, and examining how they were able to successfully employ their leadership and navigate pitfalls in their new mid-level leadership positions.

I am seeking out participants to help me in this qualitative research study. Based upon careful research of qualifying factors, for those eligible to participate in the study, I have determined that you would be a great match as an interview participant. The interview will take approximately 45-60 mins and will be conducted in-person at a location of your choosing.

If you are interested in participating, please let me know via email and I will follow up with you regarding next steps.

If you are not interested, please also follow up via email so that I may remove you from my list.

Let me know if you have any additional questions. Thank you for your consideration and I hope you have a terrific day!

Best,

Erica S. Little
Doctoral Candidate | Ed. D. Organizational Leadership
Pepperdine University