COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH IN ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract
This research involved a study exploring the changes in an academic institution expressed through decision-making in a shifting leadership culture. Prior to the study, the school was heavily entrenched in authoritarian and centralized decision-making, but as upper-level administrators were exposed to the concept of collaborative action research, they began making decisions through a reflection and action process. Changing assumptions and attitudes were observed and recorded through interviews at the end of the research period. The research team engaged in sixteen weekly cycles of reflection and action based on an agenda they mutually agreed to and through an analysis of post-research interviews, weekly planning meetings, discussions, and reflection and action cycles. Findings revealed experiences centering around the issues of:

- The nature of collaboration- it created discomfort, it created a sense of teamwork, it created difficulty.
- The change of environment in the process- team members began to respect each other more, and the process became more enjoyable.
- The freedom and change in the process- freedom to voice opinions and to actively listen, the use of experience to lead elsewhere in the school.
- How issues of power are better understood by working together- the former process was less collaborative, politics will always be part of the process.

As a result of this study, members have started using this decision-making methodology in other areas of administration.

Context and Background
The research for this study is the outcome of a collaborative action research team comprised of mid and top-level administrators involved in the development and implementation of academic programming in a graduate school. The institution has a history of centralized leadership but is in transition to one more collaborative in nature. The founding president of the institution served for the first twenty-five years of the school's operation until the current president took office and continued to teach for the last twenty years without administrative assignment. The first twenty-five years of the school's existence were pioneer days when it struggled in ways that are common to new institutions of learning – financially, administratively, and academically. Decisions during those years were made unilaterally by the president and a few others and a culture of centralized leadership characterized the school throughout his tenure.

In 1983, the school began a fourteen-year decline in enrollment, in part due to an authoritarian administrative culture. Although the current president has been in office since 1997, it has only been in the last twelve years since the school moved to its new campus that changes in the

decision-making process have begun to emerge as those at the highest levels of administrative decision-making struggle to embrace the ideas of collaboration and participating in planning the school's future. To complicate matters, half of the research team for this study were students in the former administrative culture and were subject to the past leadership philosophy both as students and employees. Up until the beginning of this study and after it began, early administrators of the school actively recruited support from faculty and research team members in decision-making and thus, their experiences are valuable as the issues of collaboration and participation in contrast to a centralized structure were considered.

Research Problem

The study addressed how action research can be used as a tool in academic planning for administrators who have worked in a centralized structure as they consciously seek to collaborate in decision-making. The leadership culture of academic institutions tends to change slowly and if there are no strong internal or external incentives or pressures, the changes are often minor (Kekäle, 1998). The aim of this research was to consider the adaptation of attitudes and perceptions of administrators who have been entrenched in a prolonged centralized decision-making structure. Thus, the inquiry focused heavily on the culture of the school in this study, with special emphasis on the recognized outcomes of program planning and perceptions of participants during the process.

Collaborative action research helps to decentralize control, hopefully eliminating the clash of top down and bottom up ideas by creating an organic process that synthesizes the whole. It also implicitly and explicitly empowers participants by placing the tools and the power of the change initiative directly in their hands (Calhoun, 1994). Centralized leadership can lead to the disempowerment of almost everyone in the organization except a select few who make unilateral decisions. When others are given decision-making power, they are not able to recognize their own leadership potential because they have not been allowed to incorporate a collaborative approach in their own praxis.

The decision-making process in organizations tends to address change without challenging current organizational paradigms. It starts by diagnosing the problems within the organization on an ongoing basis (so it is generative) and searching for solutions (change initiatives). Goals are set for addressing the change, yet there is a heavy cultural emphasis on values, attitudes, and organizational norms. The administrators in this research were leading in a time of institutional change. This school, like others, are divided into two main employment groups which tend to have differing values systems (Birnbaum, 1991). The decision-making paradigm of the school in its early days was based on hierarchy and loyalty. In contrast, collaborative action research (CAR) and shared leadership is based upon a system emphasizing collegiality, dialogue, shared power, autonomy, and cycles of reflection and action. Could administrators in this study begin to value collaboration even when there had been a longstanding culture of centralized and authoritarian leadership and decision-making?

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research was to describe the experiences of academic administrative personnel in a graduate school as they made administrative decisions as a research team in a time

of institutional transition. They related to them in the context of former students and employees, and since the contrast in administrative style is so dramatic from then until now, the changes they experience professionally and personally in working collaboratively is valuable to understand. If they experienced a transformative process, how is it described? Were they able to truly adjust to a collaborative environment of reflective practice or did they only appear to as they accommodated the current administrative philosophy of the school? What were their feelings (betrayal, guilt, trust, etc.) towards administrators still serving at the school they once worked for long ago, especially since these former leaders have been privately and publicly critical of the administrative decisions and philosophy of the school today? As this question is considered, the experiences of academic administrators who have served under leaders in a centralized decision-making culture were examined to see if they differ from those who are on the research team who have not. Overall, the experiences of the research team in this study were examined to see if they can serve as a basis of understanding the effect of participation and collaboration on the institution as a whole, and if other groups in the school will adopt this method modeled by the research team. The two research questions were:

- How can the experiences of the academic administrators in a graduate school be described as they move from a structure of centralized decision-making to participation, collaboration and reflective practice in administration?
- What, if any, is the impact of a smaller administrative research team in this study on the culture of school leadership in creating an environment of participation, collaboration, and reflective practice?

The Approach

The approach for this qualitative research was a semester-long study and is of interest to the reader because this CAR team was studied immediately after they completed a semester-long period of academic planning. The study examined the experiences of leaders in a school transitioning from a centralized approach of decision-making to one of participation, collaboration and sharing of ideas. Since most team members were either students or administrators in the former leadership culture, both their own ideas about the transition and their level of participation in the emerging culture is of interest. This study can also be used as a basis for change within smaller planning and leadership groups in the institution. As top-level administrators model participation and collaboration, leadership culture can change.

The foundational design of the research was an academic council of program deans and vice presidents responsible for academic programming. Each team member was interviewed during the planning period for responses to interview questions and again to clarify any ambiguities.

The six interview questions were:

- Can you describe your experience in the planning process? Can you give examples?
- What challenges have you encountered as we engaged the administrative planning process?
- What critical incidents or practices stood out to you during the study?
- Looking at the entire process, how as your perspective on the entire process changed?
- Are there any particular events or practices that were helpful or useful for you in terms of your experience?

- How has your own approach to administration changed by the process and what, if anything, are you doing differently as a result of the experience?

Rationale and Significance of the Study
The founding president of the institution resigned after a twenty-five-year term as president, but instead of retiring, he moved to president emeritus status for the last twenty years and has continued to teach without administrative responsibilities. The new president began to lead under the watchful eye of the founding president and other longtime administrators, faculty, and trustees. The generational dynamic was obvious and since there was a well-defined hierarchic and centralized structure in place, major changes needed the approval of the unofficial (previous) leadership who were still present. Most of the faculty hired under the founding president were still teaching at the school which was in a state of uncertainty as loyalties were questioned. Some who were interviewed for the presidency stayed at the school thinking the new president wouldn't have long to lead because his personality and style of leadership were so different from the founding president. Others who were interviewed but not hired for the presidency left the school and those who remained did so in a culture that did not promote collaboration and shared leadership. Decisions about structural changes or academic initiatives had been made by a few top administrators and compliance was expected when presented to the faculty and administration of the school. This methodology worked largely because those making decisions were either related to or good friends with the former president.

Patterns of the former centralized system of thinking and planning were deeply engrained in some of the longer-tenured faculty and staff and there seemed to be a fear of upsetting early administrators of the institution although they had a very small day-to-day presence at the school. Recently, the school adopted a semester system used by most colleges and universities. Under the former term system, classes lasted eight weeks and were worth two semester hours of credit. It was assumed that revising existing programs would be a relatively simple process, but it was extremely difficult due to the residual yet pervasive attitudes of former leaders who were exceptionally resistant to the new system in particular and change in general. Criticisms of those responsible for changes became personal and former administrators began recruiting alumni, faculty, and trustees to speak against the new leadership of the school with the purpose of having them removed so the former hierarchic culture of decision-making could be resumed in an institution that was now enjoying a new, debt-free campus and increased enrollment. It seemed that this change in programming was not viewed just as a reorganization of semester hour credits, but a personal repudiation and deconstruction of their work and way of thinking. As a result of that painful experience, there was an interest in helping create an environment where there was room for intentional critical thought, reflection, collaboration and participation in the academic planning process. In what ways would the planning team experience change through shared thoughts, feelings and ideas in the planning process? Could a new culture emerge that would aid the school in transitioning from one form of administrative practice to another?

Collaborative Action Research
The conceptual underpinnings for this research were based on a constructivist framework grounded upon the collaborative action research (CAR) process which includes constructing action, planning action, taking action, and evaluating action (James 2008, p. 16). These steps

include diagnosing factors that lead to the status quo, acting with the intent of moving the status quo to an increased level of effectiveness, and ultimately measuring the results of actions taken. Although there is an abundance of strategies within action research, included in this research are action research, action inquiry, action learning, participatory action research, and collaborative action research, the method used in this inquiry.

CAR has action as its focus. It requires researchers to become involved and to reflectively act in ways that will improve the teaching practices in a classroom or entire school (Carson, et. al., 1989). Action research involves a team of people drawing collective learning from a collective experience, and some argue that a collaboration is a required element of action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982) in the sense that many action research activities are best carried out with colleagues and that action research always involves the participants at least in knowing what is being explored and why. Since the institution studied has a history of unilateral decision-making apart from the input of stakeholders, the collaborative element of this action research is important in that it was not understood or possibly devalued by those on the research team at the beginning of the study.

Within the matrix of collaboration, collusion and compliance in academic planning is necessary to make explicit the conceptualization of action research as a democratic undertaking (Greenwood and Levin, 2000). In accordance with views expressed in the literature (Ebutt,1985; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996), the key aim of action research is to understand, improve and reform practice, which places it firmly within a professional paradigm built on "researcher–stakeholder collaboration" (Greenwood & Levin, 2000, 96). The extent to which this can be achieved will largely depend on who formulates this remit of "improving" and "reforming practice", a conception that resonates with Zuber-Skerritt (1996, 85) who defines action research as "critical and (self-critical) collaborative inquiry by reflective practitioners being accountable and making the results of their inquiry public self- evaluating their practice and engaged in participatory problem-solving and continuing professional development."

Ross, Rolheiser, and Hogaboam-Gray (1999) identified three main benefits of collaborative action research partnerships. First, partnerships help overcome these obstacles such as a lack of skill in methods or lack of contextual understanding of the institution. Second, contact between university researchers and teacher researchers through joint research strengthens the image of the teacher as researcher and the researcher as learner. A third benefit is that heightened attention given to a project with external resources, which may support administrators in releasing teachers to engage in this form of professional learning.

For Carr and Kemmis (1986), action research takes its cue from a practitioner's awareness that there is a gap between his or her theory and practice. CAR can help describe the experiences of administrators as it narrows the gap between theory and practice for several reasons. First, the relationship between collaboration and the personal experiences of leaders is cyclical and this relationship contributes to the phenomenon of decision-making. As one considers the previous contribution to the phenomenon of decision-making and the previous model of unilateral decision-making, collaborative action research tends to be more pragmatic in nature, being both workable in real-world contexts and meeting the needs of the institution as a whole. Collaborative

research is also "user-friendly" and makes sense to those on the research team as they use it as a method for decision-making. Because of the cyclical nature of collaborative action research, it is focused on constructive alternatives for the future instead of historical methods of leadership in the past.

The perception of action research, participation, and collaboration as a proven leadership method is also valuable if understood from the perspective of those who have served in both leadership cultures (centralized and collaborative) in contrast to those who have only known a culture that is participatory in nature. The school's values and beliefs are weakly communicated in formal, conscious leadership mechanisms, in their literature and training, and as their older practices and ways of knowing are defended aggressively, the older system of decision-making is reinforced. Is there something to be learned from the experiences of both types of administrators as they work together in a way unfamiliar to them (action based on reflection and collaboration)?

It has become popular to think of successful schools as learning organizations (Senge, 1995) and research has largely supported the finding that schools with organizational cultures that support inquiry, learning, and data-based decision-making are not only more satisfying workplaces but also more productive organizations (Rosenholtz, 1989). Noffke (1994) suggests that action research plays a role in social transformation in its concern for systemic change and implies that the current challenge is to encourage educators to view action research as a vehicle to stimulate school-wide change.

Markward and Marino (2008) identified the establishment of a common focus as one precursor necessary for systemic change. When teams conduct collaborative action research for the purpose of school improvement it enables them to develop a common focus and therefore delve deeply into issues. Through cycles of reflection and action, collaborative action research could provide the focal point necessary for school-wide change.

Summary
The action research methodology family is designed to empower all participants in the planning and change process, but it requires participants to undergo self-evaluation and reflection as they actively participate in the research process. It is a term that is broadly used and a primary element in action research is taking action as an intervention within a live context (Kasl, E., & Yorks, L., 2010). It differs as a paradigm of inquiry where the researcher's primary purpose is to improve the capacity and subsequent practices of the researcher rather than to produce theoretical knowledge (Elliott, 1991). CAR combines both the goals of improved capacity and practice of researchers, as in action research and of achieving practical objectives through group participation. CAR involves team members reflecting on their own practice as both subjects and co-researchers and team learning involves the issues of action based upon reflection and learning based upon the identification and assessment of factors that facilitate or potentially get in the way of team performance. Thus, it is ideally suited for the inquiry of this study.

Research Design
The research design of this study is represented in 5 phases (Table 1) and begins with a pre-study conversation with team members in Phase 1 centering on an action learning research paper

entitled "Critical reflections on three virtual learning community experiences" (Anand, Bohnet & Thompson, 2012). Team members were asked to critique the paper and to give

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Team members read "Critical reflections on three virtual learning community experiences" (Anand, Bohnet & Thompson, 2011). _____ Team members discussed implications of ideas in paper with team.	Team negotiated topics for a semester-long work agenda development and discussed team norms for the study.	Weekly action taken on agenda items. _____ Minutes of each meeting will be taken. _____ Reflection on decisions made from week to week	First post-study interview after completion of study based upon 6 interview questions.	Second post-study interview after completion of study to clarify issues of first interview. _____ Report back to team with study results.

Table 1: Research Design

feedback on the idea of reflection and action cycles. The conversations on the research paper served as a basis for proceeding with collaborative action research. Since this team had worked together for two years prior to the beginning of this study, their positive responses on how they viewed themselves individually and as a team were not surprising, even though there were negative pressures on the group at the time to act politically.

In the second phase of this study, the team negotiated the topics to be included on a semester-long work agenda including the addition of new academic policies, revision of existing policies, new degree programming, issues of accreditation, course scheduling, and faculty development. It also included a discussion of team norms during the study.

Phase 3 included the weekly process of introducing administrative decisions to be made, discussion of the issues, taking positions and discussing the issues, assigning action plans, and setting the agenda for the next meeting of the team.

Phase 4 in the study centered on the first interviews of team members based on the six interview questions mentioned previously. Their responses were recorded immediately after the planning period was complete and interviews were transcribed and coded for words connected to the codes of collaboration, teamwork, treatment of others, freedom and change, issues of power and teamwork by an independent coder who understands and has practiced open-coding. The coding list's inter-rater reliability was at 80 % accuracy.

Phase 5 of the study included a second interview (if needed) with each team member to clarify any issues that might have arisen in the first interview. Two team members, Gregory and Esteban were interviewed again to clarify responses. These surveys were also coded for the same themes of the initial interview.

Prior to the Study
Before this study, the school was very much entrenched in a more authoritative and centralized approach in most aspects of leadership, including decision-making and program planning. This is not to say elements of collaboration in decision-making were totally absent, but mostly to the extent of making minor changes to decisions already finalized by the president and upper-level administrators. At this time, the team began to meet and make decisions revolving around three administrative tasks; the creation of a new undergraduate degree, the reorganization of all two semester hour classes to three semester hour classes (a reduction of several classes in each degree program), and the reorganization of the school's class schedule. The administration of these three tasks seemed to be a perfect platform to model shared leadership, collaboration, and action based upon reflection, but it didn't take long for personal and political issues to become the focus. Some team members were being instructed by faculty to make sure course loads didn't increase (at the time a major concern), others politicked to save pet classes (nine were being eliminated or combined with other classes), and some were uncomfortable making changes for fear of being perceived as disloyal to the previous administration.

After months of haggling and hard feelings, the faculty warily voted for the new changes and it was evident that resistance to change in an insular environment was preventing the school from transitioning to a new way of decision-making. During the next summer, two colleagues from Columbia University and I entered into a six-month action learning research project focused on how assumptions can change through dialogue and critical reflection. This research helped me to realize that I had not properly introduced the concepts to the research team. I dialoged with each team member individually and asked them to read the research paper on the six-month study and critique the ideas presented in it, especially the concept of decision-making based upon cycles of action and reflection.

Researcher as Full Participant
I viewed myself as a "nearly complete participant" in the context of this research which presents two distinct problems (Gold, 1958). First, complete participants tend to become so self-conscious about their true self in relation to their role in the research process, often they cannot perform convincingly as a participant. Second, complete participants may "go native" as they participate in the research and in doing so violate their observer role. It is my assumption that I functioned adequately in my role as a nearly complete participant because I never became self-conscious in my role within the group. I established genuine relationships with team members for at least two years before the research period began and even before I was promoted to the vice-presidential level administrator at the school.

Study Setting
During the academic year, the team met weekly on Fridays, a day designated for meetings in the institution. At the first meeting, norms (time parameters, discussion protocol, confidentiality, etc.)

were discussed and the facilitator made a presentation concerning the purpose and duration of the research team. Team members had the opportunity to add or discuss any of these topics and final decisions were made collaboratively on all team norms.

During the following fourteen weeks, team members set weekly agendas for discussion and reflection and action on administrative items. Minutes of each meeting were taken and an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration began to emerge which was new to the institution.

Immediately following the research period, each team member was interviewed about the challenges they encountered in the administrative planning process, the critical incidents or practices that stood out to them during the study, their perspective on how the entire process changed, if there were any particular events or practices that were helpful or useful for them during the study, if their own approach to administration changed during the study and if they were doing anything differently as a result of the experience. A second post-study interview was conducted to clarify any issues from the first interview of those on the research team. Research findings were then shared with team members.

The weekly meetings were led by Gregory (all names are aliases), who acted as a facilitator, and I would stand at the whiteboard when concepts or ideas needed to be written for clarity. Meetings would not begin until all members were present and attendance by all members was nearly perfect for this study. Administrators were provided a written agenda by Gregory at the beginning of each meeting, but during the first few sessions, no one kept track of decisions made, resulting in confusion at the beginning of the next meeting. As a result, Gregory's assistant started attending the meetings and acted as record keeper by taking detailed minutes of each session, even though she did not participate in discussions.

Gregory began each meeting by reviewing items discussed during the previous meeting and asking for reflective thought on issues. For example, the team discussed Monday evening classes taught at the school. Over a hundred students registered and plans to enlarge the evening classes were discussed. We discussed developing a Hispanic institute, continuing education credits, and related administrative issues without fully considering faculty load or staffing classes. As Esteban began to reflect on these staffing issues apart from the excitement in the planning session, he came to the realization that the Monday night institute was a good idea for the future, but at present, the staffing issues prevented the school from offering more classes. During the next meeting, the rest of the planning team agreed and focused on more pressing issues.

An important quality cultivated in meetings was an attitude of patience. Gregory was skilled in introducing agenda items as he encouraged members to add thought to the discussion. After several weeks, it became apparent that the two longest-tenured members acted as representatives of the faculty as they added reflection in the context of the history of the school and from what they perceived as the attitudes of the faculty.

Danielle's remarks dealt mostly on issues of accreditation, and Esteban, feeling somewhat out of place for the first six or seven meetings, responded only when asked direct questions. He

ultimately "found his voice" and gave valuable insight. Gregory facilitated discussions and I guided thinking in terms of synthesizing and writing ideas on the whiteboard.

Sources of Data and Collection Method

Research team members were encouraged to use weekly agenda items and our deliberative process as a source of personal reflection after each weekly team meeting. Jack Mezirow (1995) emphasized the importance of critical reflection in decision-making and defined straightforward reflection as the act of "intentional assessment" (p. 44) of one's actions, whereas critical reflection not only involves the nature and consequence of one's actions but also includes the related circumstances of their origin.

The first part of each planning session was devoted to the agenda items of the last meeting and any thoughts given by team members concerning the previous week's agenda. Researchers were not required to give input and some took a while (several meetings) before feeling secure enough about their thinking to share reflections with the entire team. By the end of the project, however, all team members contributed thoughts from reflections and better decisions were made as a result. Reflective thoughts were shared by team members at the beginning of weekly sessions and during the final interviews, most of which could be considered content (what is happening) or process (how things are to be done) reflection. For example, towards the end of the semester, the team discussed developing a Hispanic Institute and became excited about the possibility of adding classes to the existing few classes offered on Monday evenings.

Team members discussed offering continuing education credit and a possible diploma program for non-degree-seeking students. Since Esteban had some administrative responsibility for non-traditional education at the school, he began to reflect on process issues while away from the planning meetings. His reflection revolved around the issues of how many faculty would be required, how it would affect course load, who would be responsible for keeping track of continuing education credits, etc. When the topic was discussed the next week, he shared these reflections and the team decided not to begin the institute until proper resources and administrative attention could be given.

Interviews

Each of the team members was interviewed based on a seven-stage methodology of thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, validation and reporting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Thematizing is based upon clarification of the study's purpose and asks the questions why, what, and how. Designing the interview involves planning the number of participants, the knowledge to be gained and the ethical dimensions of the process.

Interviewing is the actual gathering of information from reflection and interpersonal relations as questions are answered by research participants in the study. Through this stage, knowledge evolves through a dialogue (p. 125). Transcribing involves preparing the interview material for analysis, translating from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules (p. 165).

Analyzing the data means examining it for meaning. After analyzing the interview material, the researcher is to verify the reliability and generalizability of the interview findings. Although the findings in this study are somewhat case specific, it is believed that they are largely transferable to other institutions of like size and mission who have experienced dramatic changes in leadership style. The final stage is where researchers report the findings of the interview as after the research team finished the semester-long planning process and once again to clarify any ambiguities in the first interview transcripts.

Interview Protocol
Team members in this collaborative action research effort were interviewed before the semester-long project began based upon the following six questions:
- Can you describe your experience in the planning process? Can you give examples?
- What challenges have you encountered as we engaged the administrative planning process?
- What critical incidents or practices stood out to you during the study?
- Looking at the entire process, how has your perspective on the entire process changed?
- Are there any particular events or practices that were helpful or useful for you in terms of your experience?
- How has your own approach to administration changed by the process and what, if anything, are you doing differently as a result of the experience?

The team member interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol, ranging from 45 to 60 minutes in duration, and occurred in the campus offices of participants. Data were gathered and recorded with participant permission and was audio recorded. Audio recordings were then sent to a professional transcription service (rev.com) and returned within a week's time. Transcripts were then coded into emerging themes and analyzed. Transcripts of the first and second interview were sent to an independent researcher who understood open coding methodology and inter-rater reliability. I sent her the coding scheme I used and between she and I the codes were examined as a source of findings for this study were 80% in agreement.

Research team members were only interviewed on a volunteer basis and were informed beforehand that the interviews would be audio recorded. The coding scheme was not predetermined but rather emerged from the data analysis and was also guided by the underlying purpose towards characteristics of collaborative culture and culture change. Team members were interviewed a second time, if necessary, to review their own transcript for accuracy and to clarify any confusion in questions or answers.

Meeting Minutes
Minutes from weekly meetings were taken as a source of information on decisions made throughout the collaborative action research (CAR) process. Copies of minutes were distributed to team members each session to serve as a reminder of previous decisions made and to serve as a written source of reflection between weekly meetings. Minutes described the issues discussed, decisions made, action steps, and the individual(s) responsible for completing each action step.

Coding Scheme

Data collected from team members' first and second interviews were coded based upon emergent themes and were influenced by the literature reviewed around themes of collaboration, co-inquiry, and team learning. Moustakas (1994) defined invariant horizons to be derived through significant statements which "point to the unique qualities of an experience, those that stand out" (p. 128). I reviewed the database, marked significant passages and identified 105 horizons. The 105 significant statements or horizons were then clustered into four meaning units or themes and nine findings or subthemes. "From an extensive description of the texture of what appears and is given, one is able to describe how the phenomenon is experienced" (Moustakas, 1994, 78). The four themes and relevant findings within themes of the interviews are:

- Collaboration is new to the planning team
  - Collaboration created discomfort in the process
  - Collaboration created a sense of teamwork in the planning team
  - Collaboration created a sense of difficulty to the planning process
- The Environment in the planning process changed during the study
  - Team members began to respect and trust each other more
  - The planning process started becoming enjoyable
- Team Members Found Freedom and Change in the Planning Process
  - Freedom to voice opinions and to actively listen
  - Using experience to lead outside the planning team
- The Issue of Power is Better Understood by Working Together
  - The former process was less collaborative
  - Politics are a part of the planning process

Participants

The following six participants' names and academic titles were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Identifiers, such as academic functions, offices, or other administrators not participating in this study were changed so that confidentiality would be maintained.

Martin

Martin is in his mid-sixties and is the senior member on the research team. He came to the institution a year and a half after its first year of operation and graduated with a Master's degree in two and a half years. Upon graduation, he immediately applied for the doctoral program and is one of three institutional faculty members (earned both Master's and Ph.D. degrees at the institution) on the research team. He was asked to fill in for a professor in his field who went on sabbatical for one year and when the professor he was replacing returned, the administration asked him to join the faculty full-time and he has been teaching continuously since. He became an academic dean several years ago and has served on the academic council since then. Since Martin has the longest tenure on the academic council, his opinions on the planning process are uniquely valuable. He served fifteen years under the previous administration and twenty years under the current leadership of the school and has insight into both administrative cultures.

Evan

Evan is in his early fifties and came to the institution as a student in the mid-1980s and graduated with a Master's degree. Upon graduation, he spent ten years as a practitioner before returning to

the school nine months after the second president's inauguration. He enrolled in a doctoral program at another institution just before returning and graduated in 2001 with a Ph.D. He served as a mid-level director for six years before being named as a vice president in 2004 and executive vice president in 2006. He and Gregory are the only team members who did not enroll in a doctoral program immediately upon completion of a Master's degree and his years in the field adds a needed dynamic to the planning team.

Robert

Robert, also in his early fifties, is an institutional faculty member who enrolled as a student in the mid-1980s and completed his Master's degree three years later. Upon graduation, he immediately entered the doctoral program and graduated five years later with his doctoral degree. While in the doctoral program he was recruited to start school in the early 1990s as a mid-level administrator and later joined the faculty upon completion of his doctoral studies. He served four years under the previous administration before the inauguration of the second president and has served as an academic dean since the early 2000s. He and Martin are the only two team members with administrative experience in both cultures.

Esteban

Esteban, in his early thirties, is the youngest of the three institutional faculty members. He entered a Master's program at the school and graduated two and a half years later. Upon graduation, he was immediately accepted into the doctoral program and graduated again with his doctoral degree. He served for a short time as an adjunct before leaving the school to serve as a practitioner for a year, then returned as a professor when an opening became available on the faculty. He has been a full-time faculty member for several years and has served as an academic dean for a few years. He and Danielle are the youngest members of the planning team by twenty years and have served only a short time on the academic council.

Danielle

Danielle, also in her early thirties, earned a Master's degree at the school and three months after her graduation was hired as an administrative assistant. Two years later, she began doctoral studies at another institution and graduated several years ago. Because of her years of experience with institutional assessment, she was hired upon completion of her doctoral studies as an instructor and the director of institutional assessment, which placed her on the academic council and research team for this study. As the only female on the research team, her perspectives on age and gender as it relates to the planning process are valuable.

Gregory

Gregory is in his mid-fifties and earned his Master's degree at another institution in 1991 and enrolled in the doctoral program at the institution in 2000. He has the shortest tenure as student or administrator than anyone else on the planning team, yet has the most responsibility. The current president had been here three years when Gregory enrolled, so he never had the opportunity to serve under the previous administration.

Gregory became an academic dean several years ago and the leader of the academic council in 2011. Through his relationships on the faculty over the last several years, Gregory has

commented on the very obvious shift in philosophy with the current administration and a resistant attitude towards it.

Findings
Data collected from team members' interviews were coded based upon emergent themes and sub-themes from those interviews (figure 1). The interview material provided by the participants served as the basis of themes and subthemes and described what was experienced by the participants.

Theme 1: Collaboration
Only one person on the research team had regular experience (not at this school) using collaboration as an intentional methodology. The new experience of the collaborative process for this team and their thoughts concerning shared leadership for this study varied and revolved around the central ideas of the characteristics of collaboration in the planning process, the sense of teamwork they felt (for some the first time in academic planning), and the difficulties they faced as in the process of academic planning as a collaborative team.

Subtheme 1: Characteristics of the Process
Through the semester-long planning period, attitudes toward the perceived characteristics of the collaborative process were varied among team members. Danielle, new to
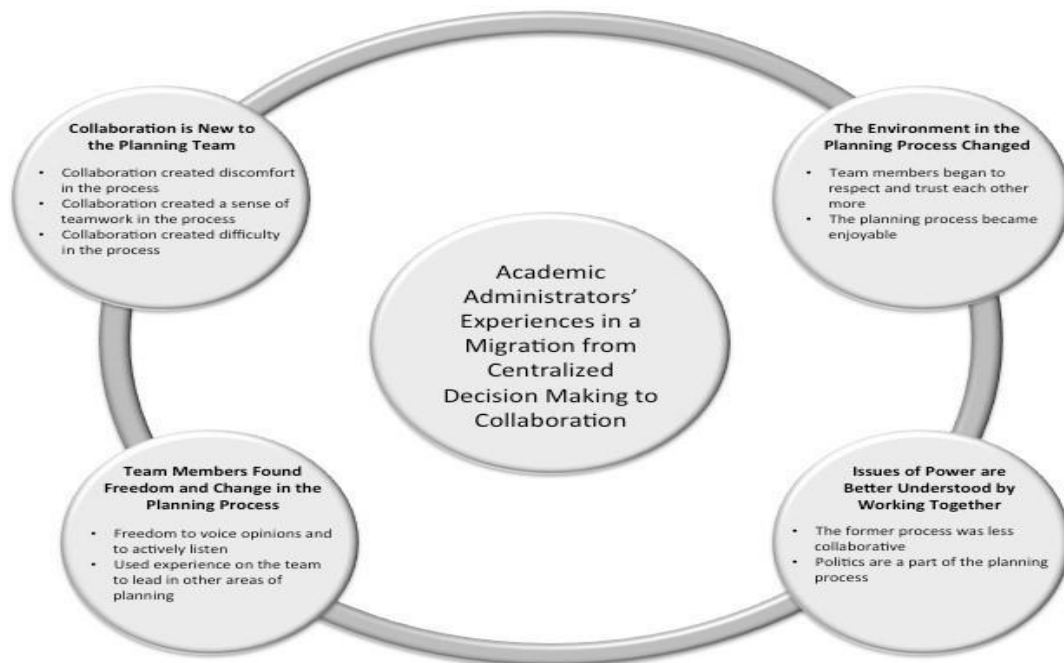

Figure 1. Themes and Sub-themes

administration and the idea of shared leadership, commented on how confusing collaboration can be at first. "I'm ready to get to the bottom line and so, it can be a little exhausting to me for so many ideas to be thrown around. If I can just maintain my concentration on where we've been and

the sense of teamwork we felt (for some the first time in academic planning), and the difficulties we've faced as in the process of academic planning as a collaborative team." When two administrators who were not on the planning team came into talk about a matter towards the end of the study, she worried that they might not understand how we were working as a team. She commented, "It was said to them that we're just expressing ideas, so maybe they left there thinking, okay, that was a little crazy. What just happened?" By the end of the study, though, she was impressed on how independent ideas came together to form new ideas and how the process helped to uncover blind spots in the thinking of the group as a whole through an imperfect process of decision-making. She remarked, "Maybe there's not the prevention of a mistake, but just some blind spots that are brought to light."

Esteban, also one of the younger team members didn't have much experience in making decisions as a group and was not sure what to expect at first or how to contribute to the group. It took several weeks for him to offer an opinion or comment without being asked directly. When asked, he commented on the pace at which the team worked. "I wouldn't consider what we do as slow, but I wouldn't consider what we do as fast. I like that we don't just jump into something, but we think about it and we let it brew a little bit, take a couple of three weeks to talk about it to see what else percolates." He also remarked that "sometimes hurrying up is slowing down. If we do it well the first time, we actually gain more ground, even though it seems like we don't, because, hopefully, we do it right the first time, or with few patches." He appreciated how the planning process of the team was connected to the mission of the school and how collaboration helped them take an institutional-wide view, instead of just maybe a departmental view which ultimately leads to decisions that result in a better educational experience.

Gregory, who has several years of administrative experience, noted that collaboration is characterized by the sharing of ideas and that "my experience has been great in the sense that there is not one person who dominates the meetings." He agreed with Esteban that the collaborative process in decision-making helps keep planning connected to the mission of the school by preventing institutional drift, even though the process takes longer than unilateral decisions made by one or two people. It "helps us to overcome some of those potholes that would damage the institution." He probably summed up the collaborative process best by stating that "I just think it's been a great journey. You're always in a journey no matter." Both Gregory and Martin noted that having a stated agenda was a crucial characteristic to the collaborative process. Gregory remarked that "the agenda must be small enough that it doesn't overwhelm the committee" and that when it is too large, team members begin to feel "I don't see how we're going to be able to accomplish all of these things." He expressed a concern that the team must "make sure that we prioritize, that we set a reasonable time for each one of these things to be done." Martin added that "the practice of having the agenda, reminding us this is where we are and this is what we've done, is a minor thing but it was something I think that was helpful."

Subtheme 2: Sense of Teamwork
The collaborative experience of planning together promoted a sense of teamwork in the planning team. Danielle remarked that the team learned to "help each other" in decision-making and how they needed each other for perspective. Martin added that a larger part of teamwork was making compromises to accomplish the task. He said "some people on the committee had strong opinions

about how things should be done and so when we work out compromises, I think that that's been helpful and then interesting and we all kind of have to give a little bit when we have the final product come together." He commented on the amount of work that can be accomplished by the sharing of ideas and leadership. "I think we've accomplished a great deal. As I said before, it was a pleasant experience and I learned things that were helpful to me." Gregory added that working together in a collaborative way can lead to frustration. "I'm learning that sometimes I get frustrated. I have an agenda. I think I know what's right. That just comes with a part of leadership mindset." Even though he worked through the problem, He added, "I have to admit that I was not collaborative in my mindset at one point… I was going to take my ball and say 'I'm not playing.' That is something I saw in myself that I'm not proud of. I think it's (the process) working to make me more mature." One of the characteristics of the process he valued was a greater appreciation for other team members. "It (the collaborative process) gives you a greater appreciation for the ideas and the contributions of others. This has just further solidified that everybody's contribution is important." Robert commented on the synthesis of opinions as a main characteristic of collaborative planning. "In the process, I've noticed some who maybe changed their view a little bit resulting in a synthesis which is better than anyone's individual opinion because we sharpen each other in the process. It's been good and a lot of times the idea on the table will be very different within ten minutes just because of some very good differences that arise. People will see things that whoever originally put that idea on the table didn't see."

Through the comments of the team, it is clear that they experienced personal growth and insight into the characteristics of collaborative planning. For some, taking the time to reflect on the process in the two interviews was new in itself.

Subtheme 3: Difficulties in the Process
Although team members were usually positive in their comments about the characteristics of the team process, they were quick to share their difficulties as well. Gregory began with a concern that the process could lead to the production of ideas without resulting follow-through, and that conversation and the sharing of ideas can easily become the focal point without any resulting action. He offered, "Sometimes in an idea factory, you get ideas but then you don't get down to the nitty-gritty details of things. When that happens, you have a lack of communication, and then people are a little bit uncertain what they are to do. One of the challenges I would add is the fact of trying to say, 'Okay, now what? Now what are we going to do in order to make these things take place?'" His solution was to determine priorities and keep on track in the process. He remarked, "one of the biggest challenges is to determine what the priority is in regard to the ideas that are thrown out, and determine what is best for us to deal with. The time span to deal with that issue is another matter that you have to consider."

Danielle agreed by saying, "Maybe (there is) just a degree of frustration that all the discussion is theoretical in nature and just actually, it's being played out practically within our staff and faculty." Gregory also observed that there was tension as the team met and planned as it became obvious that some were more observant to details than others. He said, "I guess one of the dangers with different people is that you have some who are not perfectionist and you have other people who like things done well, and they brood over details and those kinds of things. They want things done perfectly." He concluded his remarks on the difficulties of collaboration by

stating the risks of keeping in line with institutional mission and the difficulty of learning to focus on doing less and better. Gregory stated, "It's a wise thing to do (collaborative process), but there is the risk. We have a purpose statement and we have certain parameters that govern what we do. If we apply the rules, a lot of the risk goes out."

Martin was quick to point out that early in the process when the team was not yet accustomed to planning together, collaboration almost became a barrier to decisions being made. In using a change from the term to semester system as an example, Martin remarked, "As far as going to the semester system, that's something that almost didn't get done. That's something that if the administration had simply decided that it was best for the school, and we're going to do it and this is it. In some cases, that could have been an advantage." He was also quick to suggest that even though he was on the planning team, he did not consider himself as part of the administration. Collaboration erases a hierarchical approach to the point that leadership structure becomes uncertain. When asked if he was a part of the administration, he replied "I really sort of think of the administration as the Vice Presidents and so on (laughs) but I guess, I am a dean so I'm sort of part time administration." Martin also was emphatic about the difficulty of keeping faculty involved in the collaborative process in addition to decisions made by the planning team. Again, referring to the change from terms to semesters, he said, "still, when the committee finally voted to do it then that meant that there was more faculty input, faculty agreement and I think that when that went on to the full faculty, that helped."

Robert's concerns about the difficulties in the process revolved around maintaining quality within the institution as we sought to reach more students with different (new) delivery systems. He commented, "the thing that stands out to me is that we're really trying to make sure that if we go to other delivery processes that we keep the result very high. I think that the tension between our desire to serve more students and to make sure that we have good products – so to speak – so that we give the students what they need for training. That tension is real, it's there and that thing think is what stand to me as something that we regularly were wrestling with in this organization."

As a result of the study, team members reflected on some characteristics of the collaborative process, a sense of teamwork that was felt among the members, and the difficulties inherent in the process. It seems that they gained better insights into their own ideas about these matters through the two interviews with the researcher.

Theme 2: Environment
Related to the interview material on teamwork was a larger theme of how team members treated each other in the planning process. There were repeated expressions of how others felt respected and trusted and how the planning environment was seen as enjoyable.

Subtheme 1: Respect and Trust
Esteban, new to the process and the team, was silent during most of the initial meetings. He attributed this to feeling like somewhat of an imposter who wasn't supposed to be on the planning team due to a lack of anything to contribute. He said he felt like "these people have it together and they have a little bit of a better background, because they've done this before and why am I

here? What do I have to contribute?" By the end of the planning period, he added, "I guess you can say it this way, I feel more comfortable with my voice now." He credits this to the respect and collegial nature in the team. He remarked, "I like how the differences of ideas are handled. Of course, it's always respectfully, and everybody sees each other as a peer and everybody takes constructive criticism well, as far as I can perceive in the meetings itself." He also commented on the sense of community that was evident by the end of the study. "Part of it is community and just realizing what everybody has to contribute and just the spirit that everybody has. It's not tense. No infighting. Just a really collaborative effort of everybody, respecting what everybody has to say." When there were disagreements, Esteban characterized them as something that could be seen as positive when others add or change an idea presented to the group. He commented, "One thing I've appreciated about the committee is there really is a way to disagree cordially and to consider somebody else's idea, and also recognize the weaknesses that might be inherent in some of your ideas. Just the way to go about it, that a disagreement isn't a negative thing necessarily, or a personal thing, or a personal attack, or anything like that. That a really good way to approach things is to think through somebody else's ideas in the committee and notice some of the weaknesses you may have and do that in a good give and take situation."

Danielle also commented on the respect evident in the team through getting to know them on a personal level. She commented, "It's definitely helpful to hear different opinions and thoughts and getting to know others better, know their heart, their desire for ultimately the good of the school." Gregory added ideas about respect that centered around trust and a greater appreciation of the uniqueness for others on the team. He remarked, "You've got to trust others. If you think too highly of yourself and of your own opinions, you can mess up things. We all tend towards that. We all tend to think our ideas are the best. We think everybody else's ideas are second best. I think one of the aspects that helps me with this is always to go back and say, 'Hey, are you thinking correctly here. Adjust your way of thinking. Am I looking at this from the right perspective?'" He also remembered how he acted in ways that were not conducive to the team by saying, "I could become withdrawn and a bit belligerent at that point, and that would go against the idea of showing respect for other people."

Robert agreed about the importance of showing respect by "not bruising egos" and acting professionally (cordially) with each other on the team. "I began to think about a particular problem that we may have (in planning) and it may actually be a little too close to home for one of the other members, to think about how to fix the problem without bruising their ego." He added, "The exchanges have been cordial. Sometimes we've differed but I've really appreciated the way that differences were resolved." Martin, the longest tenured faculty member on the committee has always taken a softer approach to dealing with people in administrative matters. He said, "Yeah. I really don't think my approach to administration has changed. I think I've always been sort of low key. We want to get it done but we want to do it gently and deal with people gently on the committee and work with people and listen to other people's ideas and not try to be a dictator or anything like that."

Subtheme 2: An Enjoyable Environment
It was surprising how many on the planning team commented on looking forward to the weekly meeting. Martin commented on how much he enjoyed the meetings by saying "the collaborative

process can be a pleasant experience." Since he is connected to disgruntled faculty members not on the planning team, he also mentioned how some might have misunderstood the team. "I did enjoy the meetings and the reason I thought it was good and enjoyed it is because we were making changes that I thought were beneficial to the school. I think some people might feel like that we are coming together and doing secret things (laughs) that we're running things and we're doing secret things (laughs) that they can't be aware of through all of that and that really isn't true. Some things we can't discuss until they're done but still, it's not intended." Robert also commented on how much he enjoyed the weekly meetings and how it served as a catalyst for reflection. "I began to look forward to Fridays because I know that I have a conduit to funnel good ideas to make sticky notes or a to-do-list for that time. Through the week after the Friday meeting, the week that would follow to think through what we discussed and maybe to bring back something I thought of later. Just having that regular meeting has really helped in the process of planning, bringing to completion the things that we would need for accreditation." Danielle made a connection about enjoying the process because of the freedom it brought to the planning meetings. "My experience has been just the freedom. I really do feel the freedom to voice anything that comes to mind while I'm sitting there, even if I feel like it might be, maybe, a negative or a positive toward whatever's being discussed. I feel complete freedom to share that." Esteban made an association to his enjoyment on the team due to a lack of top-down decision-making. "An authoritarian approach definitely would be faster. I suppose with any approach, you always have weaknesses, but one of the problems with perhaps moving too fast is not thinking through all of the ramifications."

Although not every member mentioned looking forward to the weekly planning meeting or the enjoyable environment it provided when interviewed, as part of the team, the researcher would note that these statements seem to be authentic due to his personal experience with the team on a weekly basis. Most team members would go out to lunch together afterwards and seem to build deeper relationships as a result of the process.

Theme 3- Freedom and Personal Growth
Closely associated with the ideas of enjoyment were the expressions and themes of freedom and change in the collaborative process. Since collaboration in academic planning had been missing in the school to this point, it was interesting to see not only what the participants said in the interviews after the study was completed, but the way in which they communicated. It seemed they were genuinely eager to express their experiences through the process.

Subtheme 1: Freedom
Danielle described the weekly planning process as the team beginning each session with a roundtable discussion. She explained, "basically, we come in and we sit around a table, so it's a roundtable discussion, and everyone feels free to voice maybe opinions or concerns or different thoughts they may have." Gregory started by noting a sense of academic freedom in the planning process. He commented, "there is an academic freedom in the meetings, which is refreshing because so often in meetings of this sort there's usually some dominant personality that doesn't allow for freedom of ideas and thoughts." He also noted that this ability to share freely led to several periods of insight. One example he referenced was the realization that one academic department had become unbalanced in their course offerings due to personality problems among

its faculty. Gregory remarked, "what developed was a whole culture of one department in the school that had begun to speak too dominantly in that area… it was like an 'aha' moment for the academic council." He also commented on the freedom to not have all the answers as a person on the planning team. He observed, "Hey, I don't have to come up with all the great ideas. I don't have to be the Wizard of Oz to come up with every idea that's going to make things happen. It's very helpful to know and freeing to know that when you walk in there, you don't have to know everything." During the study, the planning team stepped in to shore up academic standards in some departments. Using this example, Robert spoke to the potential abuse freedom can bring. "Let me put it this way, when the academics are really unguided and you have professors within the department that have a tremendous amount of freedom but really very little standardization within departments - it's very difficult to measure the learning or anything and how much is being accomplished student-to-student, if they're taking different professors."

Subtheme 2: Personal Growth
Related to the idea of freedom was a notion of personal growth. Danielle, the youngest member on the team, began the discussion by connecting the idea of personal growth to age. She said, "Since I'm so young, it's hard to know if it (the planning process) has changed me (laughing). I don't have a lot of experience in administration to draw upon. Maybe it's forming, but I think it has definitely influenced me." She added additional personal insights by making comments about less stress in decision-making in areas outside of the academic planning meeting and giving others a voice in planning. She commented on the issue of being less stressed by using an example of planning a school-wide picnic. "Yes, it (the planning process) has been definitely helpful. It takes off some of the stress of being the one that's making all of the decisions. Again, it brings to light different ideas of what someone might enjoy doing." When meeting with her staff to plan, Danielle now uses a collaborative approach that was missing before participating in this study. When asked if there is anything that she is now doing differently as a result of this experience in this planning process, she commented, "Yes, shaping how I view other meetings with other staff and listening and letting everyone have a voice." She elaborated, "what I mean by that is on a smaller level, like if my office is planning something that's an event for students. I've tried to collaborate, involved Ms. Baxter and Ms. Merrill, so that we all have a say in planning."

Esteban, also a younger member on the team, noted how the process has helped him to be more active in planning and has led to greater personal reflection. He stated, "I'm more than a listener… I've been participating more, voicing what I have, a thought, or an idea." When asked about his greater involvement in using personal reflection, he responded, "Yes, it helps that we don't necessarily flesh everything out in just one meeting. We have some time to digest and think about what we've talked about and we have the week to let that level and come back." He also commented on how the team learned to listen and reflect more before acting. Using a planning idea of conducting workshops for people proposed in the planning process, Esteban recalls how reflection changed the course of thinking. He remembers, "I think a couple of weeks ago maybe is a good example where we began to say, 'What if we had these workshops? We can do this and this and this.' I think it pretty much naturally sprang out of that particular meeting, and then at the next meeting (after a period of reflection), it was a little bit of, 'Wait a minute, who's going to teach this? Are we overtaxing ourselves?'"

Although Martin does not sense that his personal administrative style has changed dramatically as a result of the study, he has become more inclusive in other planning venues. Using the planning example of creating a syllabus template for the institution, he remarked, "I think the syllabus (template) for example, I tried to do better at that. I see the importance of having that and, yeah, we have the model (template) and one thing I think is that I may even try to be more inclusive and so forth with the (academic department) committee. I think that is helpful. We've done that with the academic council so it may be good for me… I'm going to try to get their input to help maybe put these together rather than just trying to do it myself."

Gregory also noted that the process has brought personal growth in the areas of his own maturity and his respect for the mission of the institution. He noted, "Yes, I think it has changed. As I've mentioned earlier I think that probably coming from a background of athletics, there is a culture of the John Wayne mentality. It was 'my way or the highway' kind of mentality to a more of understanding that everybody makes a contribution. I think this effort has helped to solidify a journey that I've been on in regard to leadership." He added, "I think it's (the planning process) working to make me more mature in regard to … when things don't go in the exact direction I think they ought to go, to relax and say, 'You know what? Unless this is a non-negotiable, there are a lot of negotiable areas, and being able to discern between those negotiable and non-negotiable areas has been helpful.' It's always a journey of trying to have iron sharpening iron, and saying, 'Hey, I need to get better in certain areas of my life.'" In thinking of personal growth in his respect for the mission of the school, Gregory stated that "When we come to this issue or whatever we're trying to put forth before the faculty, before the student body, before anything, that we're able to communicate it to them in a way that perhaps would help us to overcome some of those potholes that would damage the institution."

Theme 4: Issues of Power
Since this study was conducted in an environment of turbulent change in administrative culture, the issues of power and politics were evident in the interviews of participants, especially Martin and Robert who served under both administrations. Themes of how planning was done then as opposed to the current method emerged, as well as issues of politics in leadership.

Subtheme 1: Then and Now
Martin began discussing the issues of former and current culture by commenting on people's attitude toward change as it relates to generational perception. He remarked, "I think that most, many people are skeptical and maybe even afraid of change. I think when something is going to change so dramatically, I think that there is fear and I do think some of it is generational. This is what we've always done for almost 40 years and it was something that some people just thought that this is the way to do it. I think sometimes it's (a fear of) the unknown because they haven't done it that way before so they don't know that it would be better (laughs)." Martin noted that a hallmark of the previous administration was its centralized leadership style. He remembered, "I think that probably most of the decisions that we were making were more top-down" and added "I think we've done more discussion and brought more people into the process than we used to back in the late '80's or '90's. That was something that was just announced. Again, I don't know all the inner workings of the (school) but probably those things (administrative decisions) were done by fewer people." He concluded his thoughts by stating how much easier authoritarian

leadership is on those making the decisions by commenting, "They (used to) know a lot of things that everybody else didn't know and some decisions were easier just simply for them to decree, essentially."

Robert, the only other team member who served under the previous administration began by commenting on the activity of the current administration and faculty. He remarked, "It's been a good experience for me. I've been very appreciative that the (current) administration wants help in the whole process of stirring the academics here at the school. Some places that I've observed have been far too tamped down and others maybe a little bit too passive of the administration and the faculty. I think that this is so far a very good and happy medium (the current planning model) to have members of the faculty involved in the process with the administration and for there to be more of a cooperative process and outcome." He also noted the previous programming model was more driven by a few than shared by many and that the programming output today is better because of collaboration. Robert remembers that administrative decisions were "much more driven" and also recalls "much more of the academic programming was driven by individual professors rather than there being a better amount of cooperative within departments, between departments and between departments and administration." In speaking of the new collaborative approach to planning, Robert explained, "What we're trying to do is to make sure of the product and to think about what will be better for all the students." When asked about the differences between then and now, Robert commented, "we didn't have the same process that we have now. Collaboration wasn't so much the desire. Certain people had an agenda and the agenda was going to happen. I watched the organizational chart collapse from about five or six vice presidents down to one." When asked to describe this collapse of the organizational chart, Robert continued by saying, "It was very different. There was one man who had an agenda and, this is really hard to say, but if you had a good idea, often it was presented to the president (as another administrator's idea) without you being there." As an example, He mentioned an issue of designing a cover for a school publication that was his idea but was credited to another administrator. He remarked, "Our silver anniversary catalog is a good example- the cover design. Various things like that."

Even though Danielle wasn't an administrator during the early years of the institution, her perception was that the planning model was more authoritarian. She remarked, "I definitely see that I used to think that it was more of a top-down decision-making process. Now that I'm involved in this, I can see how the ideas of other people really shape and mold and change, maybe not the initial idea, but the direction or the timeline." When asked why she believed decision-making was more "top down" in the early days of the institution, she replied, "Maybe because I wasn't involved in the meetings and so, I didn't have a voice or a say. Maybe it was just a perception. I don't know if it was true."

Subtheme 2: Political Issues
Related to the issue of power was the theme of politics in the process of decision-making and leadership. As the leader of the planning team, Gregory began by discussing the shift in philosophy from the previous administration and its effect on the administration and faculty of the school. He said, "Even though I wasn't under the previous administration, it's very evident that there is a shift in philosophy with this administration. You can see it through the experience of the faculty as they're sitting there (and) they're used to things just being made … statements

made, and direction given. The attitude is you don't butt the administration and questioning can be a problem." Robert remembers that he was actually reassigned to another office due to differences of ideas in fundraising. He commented, "There was a goal one time. They wanted fundraising and I had an agreement with Dr. Garrett that it (the goal) was for (student) housing, that it would be new donations (not from the regular donor base). At that time, Dr. Malcolm wanted to go ahead and do it (ask the regular donor base for contributions for student housing). What happened then? Dr. Garrett decided that there was another office I needed to be in and brought in another man to do development. When I agreed to work (for the institution), I asked Dr. Garrett 'Who will I work for?' and he said 'For me.' After this incident, someone else was brought in and the (organizational) chart was immediately changed. The person was now under Dr. Malcolm. Saying all that to say, there wasn't a lot of collaboration there."

Martin added that political issues often resulted in unilateral decisions about academic programming. As an example, he remembered how one administrator wanted to start a doctoral program against the wishes of every other administrator in the school. He said, "we had resisted that for a long time but then other schools were training people (with this degree) and finally, the school decided that we needed to do it. Others were doing it. That's something that the institution ought to do as well. I remember finding out about that and it was just sort of announced." Danielle also commented on the transparency of the current planning model and resolution of conflict by team members. When asked about the planning process, she said, "No. I feel like there's no one driving a (hidden) agenda." When asked to characterize disagreements between team members, she remarked, "You definitely can come at a place where you disagree, yes. It doesn't have to cause fighting, but there are disagreements on what should be done." When asked for an example, she commented on the team creating a non-residential doctoral degree during the course of this study and one member who was opposed to it initially. She said, "Like for Martin, maybe his preference was not to have a non-residential PhD, but we thoroughly discussed it. After we thoroughly discussed it, we talked it out, came to agreement, and we moved on."

Conclusions
The first conclusion concerns describing the experiences of academic administrators migrating from a process of centralized decision-making to one intentionally designed to promote participation, collaboration and reflective practice. First, cycles of reflection and action in collaborative action research can provide a focal point necessary for school-wide change (Markward and Marino, 2008) as the experiences of administrators are understood. Creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust can greatly enhance the planning process. Although the process is mostly linear, there is a non-linear and iterative aspect to this way of planning that can be thought of as a "journey." Action inquiry works primarily from the inside-out when we realize there is a gap between what we wish to do and what we are able to do. An awareness of that gap can lead to the development of a clear intent to accomplish something beyond our current capacity (Torbert, p. 6). Second, the freedom to roam intellectually, to think and explore ideas in the planning process is best understood in the context of resultant action so the team does not become an "idea factory." Recording thoughts and ideas collectively prevents the group from simply theorizing and action plans based upon group decisions brings the process full circle when team members meet again to discuss action taken on decisions made.

The second conclusion involves an understanding of the limitations of centralized authoritarian planning in relationship to collaboration based on cycles of reflection and action. It is also interesting and useful to understand the experiences of administrators who have made decisions in a centralized, hierarchical system but are now moving to one of collaboration and shared leadership which moves the team towards a more critical or emancipatory form of action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Winter, 1989). The process of becoming more than "prisoners of the past" includes recognizing that centralized planning is often easier, devoid of dialog and discourse which can produce a platform for investigation and practical action (Gustavsen 1985, 474–475). Communication between team members is key and is developed out of mutual trust and respect and is facilitated through the use of a weekly agenda, clear action plans with assignments and a time for report-back from team members.

The third conclusion relates less to the process and more to the people in it. First, team members began to look forward to the generative space created each week and the personal growth they experienced as a result of it. Action research seeks to give voice to people by presenting their experiences (Stringer, 1999, 25–28, 207–208) and the institution is better served when people making programming decisions feel valued by those in it. The camaraderie experienced by people who plan on a regular basis can be misunderstood by those not a part of it, and if they are invited to join in it might "seem crazy" to them. Second, better decisions are made when people feel valued in the process. Gustavsen's (1985, 474–475) nine criteria for evaluating the degree of democracy in a dialogue used in action research speaks to the value people should feel in the process of decision-making. The dialogue is a process of exchange between participants, all concerned must have the possibility to participate, everyone should also be active in the discourse, all participants are equal, work experience is the foundation
for participation, the dialogue must be considered legitimate, it must be possible for everybody to develop an understanding of the issue, all arguments which pertain to issues under discussion are legitimate, and the dialogue must continuously produce agreements which can provide a platform for investigation and practical action.

The fourth conclusion addresses the need to be explicit when engaging a change initiative in action research. My fear of appearing didactic (prophet coming down from the mountain) to the research team led me to approach the issue of decision-making through cycles of action and reflection in an indirect manner which only caused confusion and ultimately led to the initial failure of the desired change in planning method. After the team read the research paper about cycles of reflection and action (Anand, Bohnet and Thompson, 2012) and we took the time to discuss it intentionally, the way became much clearer to proceed with the study.

The fifth conclusion involves understanding the political nature of governance in
higher education (Birnbaum, 1988) as leadership is shared among faculty, administration, and trustees, especially those who are still at the institution but no longer in a leadership role. Through the final interview, team members expressed how much they enjoyed the action research effort, so much that they adopted the method in their own sphere of leadership, yet quickly stated how a political element to decision-making in institutions of higher learning will always be present.

The sixth conclusion is that it is possible for a researcher to embed himself into an action research team as a nearly complete participant (Gold, 1958) without becoming so self-conscious about his true self that he cannot perform convincingly as a participant, or "go native" as he participates in the research and in doing so violate his observer role. My relationships with team members during the two years prior to this study were no different than in the study- I remained true to my own identity. Even though there was a greater risk for me to violate my observer role, I dutifully reported my findings, honestly presenting leadership problems at the school and difficulties the research team experienced.

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