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CONCEPTS
IN HIGHER
EDUCATION

SECOND EDITION

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES



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10

LEADING IN THE MIDDLE

MARILYN J. AMEY AND PAMELA L. EDDY

Writing on leadership is ubiquitous, but the bulk of the focus of the literature relies on research with its roots in business cultures (Kouzes & Posner, 2017; Maxwell, 2013) that is then adapted for higher education (Buller, 2014; Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, & Dorman, 2013). Further adaptations are made in considering leadership in the community college sector (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Eddy, 2010). A review of this literature highlights how narrow definitions of leadership persist (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006), and that these definitions typically rely on thinking of norms based on historical singular leaders with positional power (Fletcher, 2004). Thus, who we think can lead and how they can lead builds from a long history of White males acting in authoritative ways (Amey & Twombly, 1992; Eddy & Ward, 2017). In the context of a contemporary and complex environment, the reliance by community colleges on such a narrow and small population of the talent within this sector and perceived reliance on those in top-level leadership is no longer tenable.

Furthermore, scant literature on mid-level leaders exists. There is acknowledgment of the challenges facing administrators in the middle ranks (Levin, 2001, 2017), but this work fails to explicate mid-level leadership or posit new theoretical constructs for expanding leadership beyond the roles of presidents or chief academic officers. A skills-based focus on leadership development for department chairs (Gillet-Karam, 1999) highlights preparation for moving up the career pipeline (Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010) by learning to lead (Davis, 2003) versus recognizing or valuing the roles of middle leaders on their own merits. Another area of literature on mid-level leaders centers on reasons individuals opt to not pursue top-positions (Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017); here, again, the orientation is on the brass ring of

senior leadership versus expanding recognition of the mid-level position. Amey's (1999) research on leading in the middle instead tackled the notion of mid-level leader identity in her narratives of two mid-level women administrators. She found that gender expectations and limited role authority restricted how these individuals could operate as authentic leaders, and noted how contributions of these women were not recognized within their institutions. Likewise, Levin (2001, 2017) recounted behaviors of mid-level administrators, but did not focus on how their leadership was perceived on campus.

The mid-level administrator often serves as the stepping stone for senior leadership positions (American Council on Education [ACE], 2012). Yet, we argue that conceiving of leadership beyond position title and envisioning a broader band of inclusion regarding leadership (Eddy, Garza Mitchell, & Amey, 2016) requires rethinking leadership theories. Focusing on leaders in the middle is critical as these individuals are responsible for operations and "importantly, it is mid-level leaders who operationalize institutional strategic plans, who engage with students, and who ultimately determine the effectiveness of top leadership" (Eddy et al., 2016, para. 2). For the purposes of this chapter, we define mid-level leaders as those in administrative positions of department chair, director, associate/assistant dean, dean, and senior faculty members. It is also important to understand the community college context (Levin, 2001) and to recognize differences among community colleges (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007) as the roles of middle leaders differ due to institutional and regional needs, and governance structures.

This chapter problematizes conceptions of leadership used in community colleges, with particular attention on leading in the middle. First, a portrait of current leadership thinking occurs. Next, we take a close look at what it means to lead at the mid-level. It is necessary to first define what mid-level leadership is, how leading in the middle differs from management, and how interrogating conceptions of mid-level leadership puts pressure on existing organizational structures and norms. We offer that networked, multidirectional leadership is required, and that this conceptualization of leadership necessitates new approaches in both theory and practice.

LEADERSHIP PORTRAIT

Historically, leadership research focused on Great Man theories and revolved around norms based on White men in particular (Heifetz, 1994). Early community college presidents used their position of formal authority to help create new colleges and systems (Twombly, 1995) within the cultural context of the region and in concert with local community college involvement (Ratcliff, 1994). Once established, community college leaders embraced management practices of the early decades of the 1900s that placed decision-making firmly with top-level leaders. Over time, this form of top-down leadership evolved and became more inclusive of faculty voices and somewhat more

diverse leaders (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). But the changing context of the higher education environment requires different approaches to leadership (Amey, 2013). Current demands for strategic approaches to environmental adaptation in community colleges require leaders to employ a level of cultural competency that contributes to organizational adaptation (Cameron, 1984; Heifetz, 1994) and that engages stakeholders in processes that create mutually beneficial outcomes (Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 2014). This type of adaptive leadership provides leaders a platform for understanding the complex problems that face community colleges and the type of second-order change required to move institutions of higher education forward (Kezar, 2013).

Historical Conceptions of Leadership

A review of various leadership and management eras provides a starting point for challenging old conceptions of leadership and developing new constructs of leadership, in particular when thinking about leading in the middle. Eddy (2013) posited a range of eras of leadership and management situated from the 1900s until the present (see Table 10.1). The last era noted in this previous work emerged at the turn of the century. We argue that transition into a new era is now occurring, and we have named leadership in this era networked leadership. Importantly, we posit that this new era marries leadership and management constructs into a more dynamic whole versus their treatment as distinctive constructs in eras.

The era of multi-dimensional leadership and collaboration in management that began around 2000 conceived of leading and management as two different constructs. The early 21st century witnessed resource constrictions, multiple and competing demands on community college leaders, and a move toward collaboration. Collaboration in institutions utilizes concepts of shared leadership (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001) that requires connections among various levels of leadership, and builds on relationships among leaders, faculty, and staff (Wood & Gray, 1991). Yet, in both research and practice, strong role expectations differentiated leaders and managers. Indeed, during this period, Fugazzotto (2009) argued that middle-level managers were underutilized

Table 10.1 Leadership eras and management eras in community colleges

Era	Leadership	Management
1900s–1930s	<i>Great Man Leadership—Charismatic</i>	<i>Bureaucratic operations</i>
1940s–1950s	<i>Independence—Hierarchical</i>	<i>Patriarchic</i>
1960s–1970s	<i>Maturation—Building Capacity, Human Resources</i>	<i>Unionization—entrenchment of roles</i>
1980s–1990s	<i>Resource Constraints—Strategic Planning</i>	<i>Shared Governance</i>
2000–2015	<i>Leadership in Transition: Multidimensional Leadership—Framing Change</i>	<i>Collaboration</i>
2015–present	<i>Networked Leadership</i>	

in helping institutions develop strategies for improvements in part because they were not embraced fully as leaders within their organizations.

We argue that a new era is upon us that began around 2015. This year of transition marked a decided turn toward performance-based funding in community colleges (Mullin, Baime, & Honeyman, 2015), which coincided with a downturn in community college enrollments as the economy improved (Romano & Palmer, 2016). Consistent with these changes was renewed attention to leadership transitions in the community college sector (Boggs & McPhail, 2016; Eddy, Sydow, Alfred, & Garza Mitchell, 2015). Several concurrent forces emerged around 2015 that required scholarly rethinking of leadership in community colleges as the rules of competition changed and boundaries between the college and community became more permeable (Eddy et al., 2015). This transition sets the stage for critiquing historic concepts of leading and managing and provides a platform to re-conceptualize leading in the middle.

Expanded Thinking about Leadership

Networked leadership, as we label this new era, provides a way to blur the lines between leadership and management. “As community colleges move from organizations that are loosely coupled with their communities to organizations that are tightly networked with partners in an expansive service region, so too must leaders make the transformation to a network” (Eddy et al., 2015, p. 116). A cornerstone of the network is relationships and partnerships (Eddy & Amey, 2014). Networked leaders intentionally provide connections among individuals and organizations, including developing effective communication channels and framing for others, which can create the context required for innovation and change (Fairhurst, 2011; Wyner, 2014). “Networked leaders must not only understand the importance of distributing power throughout the organization, but they must also know how to digest and interpret information for decision-making” (Eddy et al., 2015, p. 119). The networked leadership era begins to signal alterations in the definitions of leadership based solely on leaders’ location at the top of the organizational chart (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008). Instead, leadership is framed as those who are able to move the strategic mission of the college forward regardless of position, power (Heimans & Timms, 2014), the leverage of organizational learning (Kezar, 2013), and the flexibility afforded to those in the middle (Pfeffer, 1977).

KEY FRAMES OF MID-LEVEL LEADERSHIP

Previous research on mid-level leadership focused on individuals’ aspirations to move to top-level positions (Ebberts et al., 2010; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008), on leaders’ morale (Rosser, 2004), and leaders’ experiences based on gender (Jo, 2008; Vongalis-Macrow, 2012) or race/ethnicity (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017; Perrakis, Campbell, & Antonaros, 2009). To begin to construct leading in the middle in the current

environment and for the future, we consider several pertinent concepts. First, we review how traditional leadership theories contributed to thinking of leadership by position, and how historical distinctions between leadership and management (Bennis & Nanus, 1985) reinforced expectations based on organizational title. Second, we look into the ways in which institutional roles influence leading in the middle. Next, we discuss the role of organizational structure and hierarchy to explain how structure influences roles (Giddens, 1984). Finally, we consider more the previous literature on mid-level leadership and how this research informs new constructs of mid-level leadership.

Leading Versus Managing

Those leading in the middle are sometimes difficult to identify, in that institutional size, context, and organizational hierarchy complicate sorting based on title. We conceptualize those leading in the middle (those we also call mid-level leaders) as those who occupy positions outside of the top-level leadership cabinet, such as deans, department chairs, division heads, and directors. Often, those in the middle have maintained traditional managerial roles (Mintzberg, 1979), but, as we contemplate what it means to define leading in the middle, it is important to jettison some of these historical roles as they can be limiting and ultimately self-fulfilling.

Those at senior levels have authority due to position, but power within an institution goes beyond position. Moreover, newly promoted leaders often realize ambiguity in the power they possess, and that ill-defined roles complicate how those in the middle can lead (Stone & Coussons-Read, 2011). Institutional knowledge, robust and broad relationships, ability to navigate conflict, strong framing skills (i.e., the ability to communicate a particular meaning to others; Fairhurst, 2011), and understanding information and data are not linked to position but contribute to an individual's social capital and power, which are valuable aspects of leadership. Power emerges at various points of relationship intersections and network hubs—often the exact location of the work of most mid-level leaders as their work cuts across the institution. Unlike top leaders who tend to have a spotlight on them that often limits what they can say and do, mid-level leaders can embrace the power of being less encumbered and enjoy greater latitude to enact change.

Historically, attempts to define leadership resulted in a host of meanings and intentions. As an example, Bess and Dee (2008) provided a summary in their listing of five different categories: “(1) leadership as an influence process; (2) leaders as the facilitation of the achievement of desired organizational outcomes; (3) leadership as the fulfillment of group members' psychological needs; (4) leadership as a characteristic of a person; and (5) leadership as an exchange process” (pp. 831–832). Views of leadership included a hierarchy of responsibilities, a scope of authority, and particular goals for the position, and were juxtaposed with the roles of followers. Managers, instead, typically have responsibilities that serve as a conduit within the organization but, often, with a set of constraints that limit their perceived influence.

Managerial roles within organizations differ from leadership roles and are occupied by individuals who are supervisors and who coordinate the work of staff and professionals that report to them (Parsons, 1960). Building on these conceptions of managers, Mintzberg (1979) outlined three different role functions for managers, namely interpersonal roles, informational roles, and decisional roles. In considering what it means to be a middle-level leader, it is therefore important to understand the duality of roles and position from a Janusian perspective (Cameron, 1984). Those in the middle are required to juggle the historical roles of leader and manager together, to be both effective in their administrative responsibilities while also finding ways to connect more fully to mission, vision, influence, and enhance connections with others outside their jurisdiction. A move in this direction for middle leaders emerges in the research on collaborative leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 1996).

Role and Structure

Another issue in conceptualizing leading in the middle arises from roles and structures of postsecondary organizations. Early community college organizational structures mirrored those of their public school counterparts, with the founding colleges relying on organizational efficiencies (Morgan, 2006) and power more firmly rooted with the president (Eells, 1931). Campus unionization in the 1960s and 1970s further shifted roles and structures, differentiating management from labor, and creating some ambiguity for mid-level leaders with responsibilities less clearly classified. Pointedly, of the 43% of unionized campuses (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014), five states represent the bulk (60%) of unionized community college faculty (California, Illinois, Washington, New York, and Michigan). An upsurge of shared governance occurred against this backdrop of unionization, which complicated decision-making roles and did little to invest real agency in faculty (Gilmour, 1991). The value of team-based leadership (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993) began to acknowledge the leveraging of an expanded conception of leadership within college settings.

Typically, the organization's structure and prescribed roles work to limit conceptions of those in the middle as leaders. For example, a study of educational reform in New Zealand highlights how the work of middle leaders in schools is dominated by management tasks, with little or no time for traditional leadership roles of strategic planning or addressing organizational issues (Fitzgerald, 2009). Furthermore, research on mid-level management in Finland's universities of applied science revealed adaptation of neoliberal ideals in which tight coupling of the organization's sub-systems and between administrators and faculty reify top-down hierarchies versus expansions of roles (Vuori, 2015). Individuals can "choose" to stay in the middle ranks where managerial tasks shape their role in institutions based upon historical precedents (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017) or individuals can become stuck in the middle inadvertently, and become expert at the tasks deemed most important by those above them in the hierarchy (Gonzalez-De Jesus, 2012). When scholars begin to understand

more about the role middle leaders provide and afford, new and expanded conceptions that result can help recast barriers and support for those not found outside top-level positions and who historically have been only seen as fulfilling managerial requirements.

Research highlights how those in the middle sometimes have little desire for promotion (ACE, 2012; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017). Numerous reasons contribute to the lack of motivation of mid-level administrators and faculty to seek upper-level positions. For example, Sandberg (2013) argued that women often take themselves out of the running for upper-level positions in the business sector. This argument relies predominantly on the role of individual agency and ignores the role of organizational structure (Giddens, 1984). Indeed, masculine communities of practice (Burkinsaw, 2015) create institutional environments that base group norms on male behaviors, including in higher education organizations. Similarly, while community colleges are heralded as inclusive learning environments for under-represented students, the same cultural and racial acceptance, opportunities, and networks are not always present for White women and women of color who aspire to senior administrative positions. They often lack the cultural capital to combat systemic norms and the necessary support from more senior leaders to feel accepted in their roles and to achieve succeed and survive (Amey, 1999; Townsend, 1995). Perrakis and colleagues (2009) argued that “without a pipeline of racially and ethnically diverse faculty who view the ranks as ascendable, the culture as supportive, community college will be left without a pool of candidates to consider when hiring senior administrators” (p. 10). A decade later, their forecast has remained accurate. Contributing to this climate is also the lack of advancement opportunities in community colleges that often exist given flatter organizational structures, especially for those who are place bound and who often are women (VanDerLinden, 2004). Finally, perceptions of what top-level positions require also influence how mid-level leaders think about career advancement. For example, Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2017) found that community college women faculty in their longitudinal study showed little desire to seek upper-level positions as they viewed these positions as unattractive.

Roles operate on an individual level and are reinforced by ways in which individuals interact with and respond to others within the institution. Organizational roles develop as a result of a number of interactions among organizational members. Four main functions are involved in the creation of roles: (1) role senders—those who create and/or interpret roles; (2) sender expectations—originate with the role sender and are transmitted to the individual in the received role about what is expected in the role; (3) role receiver—those individuals receiving expectations from the role sender; (4) role responder—how the person in the role acts based on role expectations and how they receive this information (Bess & Dee, 2008). Historically, role senders were those in positions of authority. Critically, supervisory experience can serve as gatekeepers that prevent White women, people of color, and other non-traditional leaders from moving up into executive ranks (Donohue-Mendoza, 2012; Valverde, 2003). Given the

emergence of new conceptions of power within organizations (Heimans & Timms, 2014), roles of authority and positional power are shifting as the power of information becomes ubiquitous for those with access to social media. Widespread access to social media provides individuals with the ability to frame understanding for others and to offer alternative interpretations of events. Yet, even with this expansion of access to personal power, the complexity of projects often results in individuals taking on more narrow roles and tasks within the larger oversight of project management, making it less clear who has authority (Bess & Dee, 2008). The uncertainty of role responsibility that arises when many individuals are involved in complex team projects often results in role conflict for middle leaders, given incongruity of expectations on the part of role senders and role receivers (middle leaders most often are in this latter role).

Notably, roles are formed and constrained by the structures of organizations. Because organizational structure influences roles, it is important to understand how context influences how roles are defined. One influence is in the ways mid-level leaders note satisfaction with their work (Rosser, 2004). Individuals with high work satisfaction have higher morale when their work contributions are valued and are less likely to leave (Rosser, 2004). Unionized campuses typically have more prescriptive roles for faculty members and administrators (Twombly & Townsend, 2008), underscoring the influence of context on roles.

Matrix Versus Hierarchy

The push for networked leadership requires rethinking organizational hierarchies (Eddy et al., 2015). Historically, organizational structures relied on rigid hierarchies, with authority firmly vested at the top (Mintzberg, 1979). A matrix perspective instead allows for conceiving of more complicated organizational interactions among individuals (McPhail, 2016). A matrix structure has links to networked leadership in that it focuses on the interactions of individuals and the context of the institution. Thinking of leadership as a form of matrix involves emphasizing leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (i.e. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, ideologies, etc.) are constructed and produced” (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 668), which shifts leading as embodied in people in positions to leading embedded in relationships among actors. McPhail (2016) argued that for community colleges to be successful, restructuring reporting lines and responsibility areas is necessary, with power shared “along and among two or more dimensions” (p. 58). She maintained that a matrix organization can provide more agility in handling contemporary complex problems because vertical and horizontal leadership occurs that cuts across functional areas. Thus, authority is divided by function and by project and is not tied to position in the institution. While this kind of organizational structure may increase role ambiguity among employees and leaders (Schulz, 2013), we argue that middle leaders are particularly well suited for this type of multidirectional leadership in a matrix organization given their connectivity

within the college—up and down the hierarchy and with external stakeholders across functional units. These leaders contribute a central hub to the networks involved and needed to meet institutional goals.

Investigating less structured forms of leadership, Bolden and colleagues (2008) examined distributed leadership in higher education. They found various hybrid forms of practice including a confluence of top-down and bottom-up influences that co-existed. Navigating these hybrid forms of distributed leadership creates a more fluid organizational environment that must also continue to inhabit existing organizational structures. The level of social capital (Coleman, 1990) among individuals contributes to the ease of operating in a more complex and dynamic organizational structure. As individuals move through community colleges administrative pathways, “they may well be required to alternate between different types of role and forms of influence” (Bolden et al., 2008, p. 370). The extent of influence is tied to social capital.

Connections among individuals throughout the institution, identification of who or what bridges these groups, and how social capital accrues at different levels all begin to press for re-envisioning organizational structures. Academic organizations, including community colleges, often try to resolve their problems and approach new initiatives “either by focusing on key individuals or by restructuring, less often reflecting on the forces that connect people and enable them to work together in pursuit of a common aim” (Bolden et al., 2008, p. 372). Given the attention to relationships in leadership roles, it is important for scholars to understand more about how middle leaders operate in a matrix versus a hierarchy. An increased understanding of these types of interactions can also aid practitioners in operationalizing a change in reporting structures that moves away from organizational hierarchies.

Mid-level Leadership

Why is the mid-level leader important? Claims of a leadership crisis in higher education, particularly in the community college sector, have been touted for over 15 years (Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2007). Aging top-level leaders (the average age for presidents is 61 years old) and the lack of succession planning are cause for concern for boards and hiring committees (Long, Johnson, Faught, & Stret, 2013). When leadership is viewed as a career pipeline, then mid-level is where cultivation of the next generation of senior leaders emerges. The literature to-date on mid-level leaders focuses specifically on this issue (Ebbers et al., 2010; Garza Mitchell & Eddy, 2008). However, it is also important to view leading in the middle based on its own merits and contributions to the organization (Eddy et al., 2016). Mid-level leaders are those who “drive the bus” and take care of day-to-day operations that maintain the functioning of community colleges. Often, those in mid-level positions offer stability to organizations as they stay longer in their colleges compared to top-level leaders. Presidents have an average tenure of only five to seven years (ACE, 2012). Importantly, it is mid-level leaders who operationalize institutional strategic plans, who deal most directly with students, and

ultimately determine how top leaders are evaluated. Organizational and scholarly attention to mid-level leadership gives colleges an opportunity to leverage talent and build capacity located in leaders outside of executive leadership.

Part of the reason for the lack of consideration of the mid-level leader is due to how we define who is a leader. For example, historically, gender has played a role in mid-level positions as roles of associate deans, for example, were seen as sub-positions for women who were viewed as subordinate and peacemaking in nature (Koerner & Mindes, 1997). Another argument is that individuals in mid-level administration do not see themselves as leaders because those in the top offices do not “look” like them, and these models of exemplary leaders are what those in the middle think leadership should look like (Amey & Twombly, 1992). Similarly, inherent biases about what a leader should look or act like often preclude others from viewing those in mid-level positions as leaders.

The critical role of middle leaders emerges when recognizing how these individuals serve as boundary spanners and key sense makers within the organization (Fairhurst, 2011; Weick, 1995). Fullan and Scott (2009) offered an outline for turnaround leadership in higher education. Critical in their analysis was the distinction between competence and capability. They argued that “competence is more associated with management, whereas capability is more associated with leadership” (p. 112). In thinking about middle leaders, it is important to move past consideration of competencies (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013) that have often become screening tools to indicate readiness for advanced leadership positions, reinforcing ties between positional title and leadership. Given the narrowing nature of organizational hierarchy, attention to position only and top-level positions in particular ignores a range of talent within the institution and limits the ability to build greater leader capacity throughout. A move past singular competencies may recast the traditional *curriculum vitae* that enumerates experiences based on titles to a skill-based overview that outlines what individuals have accomplished regardless of title.

In creating an academic leadership capability framework based on their various leadership studies, Fullan and Scott (2009) identified two areas of competencies (role-specific and generic) and three capabilities (personal, interpersonal, and cognitive). They further articulated key areas in which turnaround leaders were masterful: listening, linking, and leading, which are accomplished by modeling, teaching, and learning. Obvious in this listing is the ability to capture and tap into leaders at various positions throughout the organization versus referencing only those on top of the chart. This historical tendency to think of leaders only as those at the top of the hierarchy and/or holding certain positions also prohibits those in the middle from being viewed as leaders—by themselves or by others. What happens instead if we think of the type of leadership that is occurring in the middle ranks? How do models of leadership expand? We offer some ideas about how to think differently about those in the middle and how to leverage the power of these leaders to advance the mission of community colleges.

VISIONING LEADING IN THE MIDDLE

Multiple ideals and constructs for leadership can help how community colleges leverage and build talent. Given the larger numbers of leaders in the middle of organizational hierarchies, the position of mid-level leader offers more options for experimentation of new constructs of leadership and institutional reporting structures. Similarly, people often do not consider themselves leaders until they hear it from someone else or until someone suggests that they have leadership potential (Eddy, 2009; Sluss, van Dick, & Thompson, 2011). The question then becomes how to change people's own beliefs in seeing themselves as leaders so they can take advantage of opportunities in their current positions to embrace chances to lead.

In visioning leading in the middle, we offer several key building blocks for a conceptual model that problematizes current, narrow conceptions of leadership. This conceptual model of middle leadership provides opportunities for further scholarship on the topic and for recasting existing leadership literature. First, we contextualize middle leaders within a system of networked leadership. Second, we discuss ways to conceptualize the role of middle leaders by using theories of role identity, socialization, and power. Finally, we discuss how middle leaders use relational forms of interactions and the contributions they make in the college setting.

Middle Leaders

As stated above, middle leaders are often wedged between senior administrators who expect them to fall into line with organizational plans and directives and subordinates who expect a collegial advocate and champion (Branson, Franken, & Penney, 2016). We envision instead a critical role for middle leaders in contributing to the overall idea of networked leadership, as those in the middle are connected widely to others within the institution and outside of the college (see Figure 10.1) and able to move in and out in ways that benefit those above them in the organization and those below. We posit new ways of conceiving of middle leader roles.

Permeability of the role of middle leaders is highlighted in this model by a dashed line representing the fluidity involved in the relationships among various groups. Staff and faculty members may in fact step into middle leader roles depending on the circumstances and context of the situation; they may also step away from these roles when needs or personal aspirations change (e.g., matrix leadership). Even unionized environments with contractual roles provide opportunities for faculty to step into leadership, in particular as unions and faculty have long pushed for participatory forms of governance (Richardson, 1972). The boundaries between traditional positions no longer align strictly within a hierarchy and organizational sense of permanence, but instead are flexible such that individuals may take on different responsibilities and perspectives if needed. For example, Watson (2007) showcased how a community college mid-level administrator played a pivotal role in establishing a partnership with

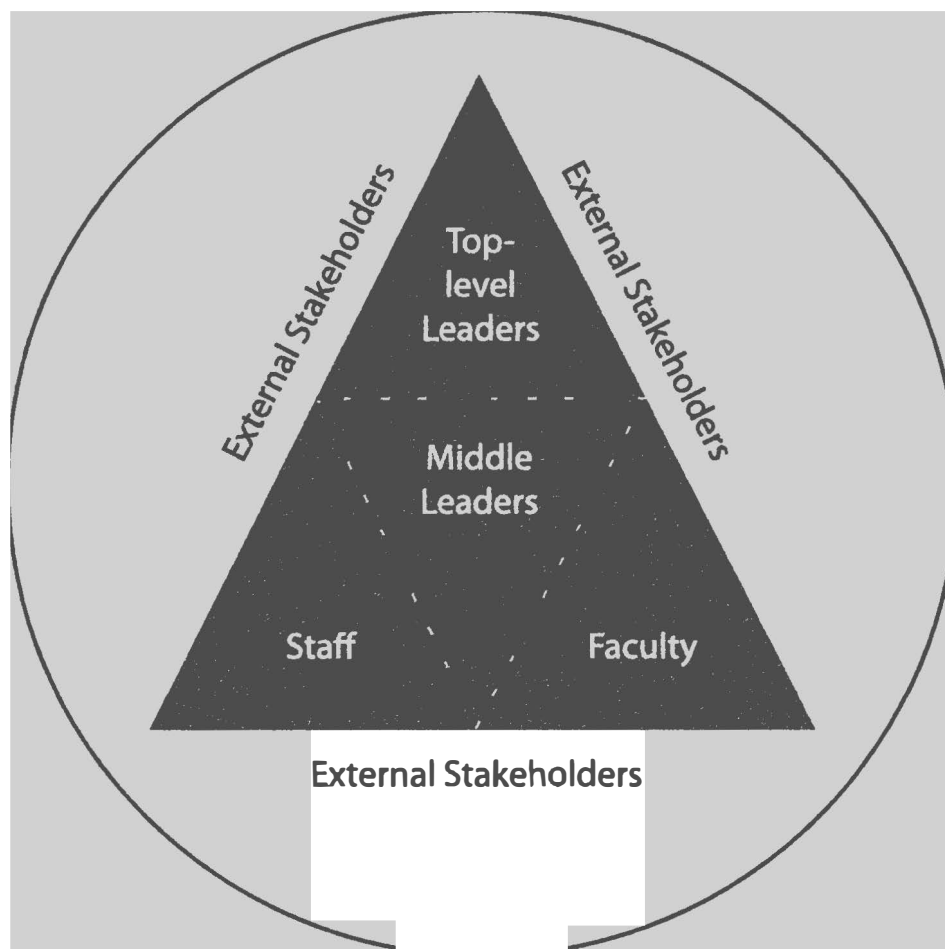


Figure 10.1 Middle leaders

Source: adapted from Eddy (2013, p. 122)

an area K-12 school district. Despite this mid-level leader's lack of institutional power or access to resources, he was "adept at making connections and use[d] his social capital to convince others that the project [wa]s worthwhile" (Watson, 2007, p. 52). The boundary-spanning components of middle leaders (Aldrich & Herker, 1977), such as the administrator in the study above, emerge based on the relationships they build and the social capital they accrue (Coleman, 1990). In this model of networked leadership, top-positional leaders may lose some degree of control and power over decision-making while mid-level leaders are in a better position to assume degrees of decision making control and power.

The move to what we call networked leadership (Eddy et al., 2015) builds on matrices of responsibilities and connections more than it relies on traditional organizational structures and hierarchy (McPhail, 2016). Changing past organizational structures is a difficult task for institutions and their leaders. A more likely alternative to overhauling structure in order to move to networked leadership occurs when capabilities more than competencies, collaboration among groups of leaders rather than reliance on a single leader, multidirectional instead of unidirectional interactions, and new conceptualizations of what leadership looks like are all part of the transition.

Scholars have highlighted small shifts towards networked leadership in calls for team-based leadership (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993) and collaborative and distributed leadership (Hickman, 2010) that moved attention from individuals as leaders

to the power of groups. In these earlier constructs of leadership, the focus was on the importance of functional leadership in teams (Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2002), and team leaders were effective in whatever role the team required. “In this manner, it can be seen how a common or traditional perspective on team leadership emphasizes the contributions of an individual leader on group processes” (Day, Gronn, & Salas, 2004, p. 858). Here, team leadership focuses more on the ways in which individuals contribute to the group and its outputs, with attention to the leadership capabilities of the individual viewed as an input. Instead, Day and colleagues (2004) argued that leadership could emerge as a result of the team and collective efforts versus as an input. In this latter case, the interchange between individuals and the collective alters emphasis as the group working together results in a different form of leading not evident or possible at the individual level.

Organizational (collective) and individual learning (Amey, 2013) are required to move towards networked leadership, and there needs to be time and opportunity for both to occur to function effectively in this way. Although research on distributed and networked leadership in higher education is at a nascent stage (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey & Ryland, 2012), “Gronn (2000) described distributed leadership as a new architecture for leadership in which activity bridges agency (the traits/behaviors of individual leaders) and structure (the systemic properties and role structure in concertive action)” (as cited in Jones et al., p. 70). The interaction between individual agency and organizational structure is at the heart of expanding notions of networked leadership. Individuals are called upon to contribute a range of capabilities, and institutions are challenged to remove barriers that allow for connecting across roles.

Scholars use multilevel approaches of leadership to understand both individual influences and group-level contributions to the organization (Yammarino, Dionne, Uk Chun, & Dansereau, 2005). Wang and Howell (2010) developed a rating scale of transformational leadership practices that are individually focused and group focused. They argued that “team leaders need to display different sets of behaviors to motivate individual followers and teams as a whole” (p. 1140), and that working at different levels requires different strategies. Central to this work is building trust among members of the institution, which requires substantive and consistent interaction and time. Commitment to this kind of multilevel leadership by community colleges, then, requires change in the more traditional managerial and task-oriented roles of those in the organizational middle.

Middle Leader Roles

As new images of leaders emerge, the role of middle leaders changes, specifically as tied to role identity, social capital, and power. Nicholson (1984) posited that individual development and organizational design contribute to how roles are perceived by individuals; and, central to thinking about roles is the concept of role identity. Role identity differs from role, as the latter is connected to a specific structural position

whereas the former refers to how an individual makes sense of that role, which is connected to cognitive schema and the social construction of behavior expectations (Sluss et al., 2011). External influences on community colleges result in changes to organizational roles and responsibilities (Levin, 2017). “Therefore, role identities within organizations, although influenced by institutionalized pressures for conformity and legitimacy, are under pressure by dynamic situational (both structural and relational) factors resulting in equivalent volatility in role expectations, identity, and behavior” (Sluss et al., 2011, p. 507). Thus, burdens of the environmental context of community colleges result in changing expectations for those in the middle, and individuals face pressure to expand their role identity. How individuals understand their role is influenced by role identity salience: The more individuals embrace their role identity, the higher the salience.

Salience is influenced by the number of relationships tied to the role and the strength or intensity of these ties (Sluss et al., 2011). Because individuals working in the middle have high numbers of potential relationships in multiple directions, the potential exists for high salience. What matters for middle leaders is “seeing” themselves as leaders and key contributors in the college not just as information conduits or brokers for others in more senior positions. Because middle leaders have multiple identities and roles, which role is prioritized emerges based on salience. Thus, on the one hand, if a middle leader identifies more with the management functions or skill-based competencies, and these images are reinforced by relationships and organizational behaviors, then traditional ideas of “manager” emerge versus “leader.” On the other hand, if others, especially top-level leaders, encourage role-making or role-taking behaviors, those in the middle can begin to craft their role as leaders.

Relationships developed tied to salience and role identity lead to development of social capital, which, as noted earlier (Coleman, 1990; Watson, 2007), is important to leadership generally and middle leadership, specifically. Social capital emerges based on “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). In many ways, individuals acquire social capital based on good will generated through interactions with others, much like a form of an IOU in which an individual holds particular negotiating power with others based on the level of good will they have performed. Leaders in the middle are primed to interact with others, both internally and externally, and as a result often have high levels of social capital based on their experiences, organizational knowledge, and work with others over time (Watson, 2007). How individuals leverage their social capital can contribute to a shift in thinking by others in the college and how top leaders view those in the middle. Instead of a role perception as managers, those in the middle will be seen as leaders who have significant roles in the new era of collaboration and network.

A shift in how power is viewed in organizations also contributes to the reach and influence of middle leaders. Historically, power was often associated with position in the organizational hierarchy (Morgan, 2006) and a finite supply of power controlled

tightly by leaders at the top. New thoughts understand power as more open and participatory, and created and used by many (Heimans & Timms, 2014). “New power taps into individuals’ capacity for growth and desire to participate in organizational strategic actions—shaping decisions, developing policy, and charting a future direction—all occurring without being told” (Eddy et al., 2015, p. 79). Conceptualizing power as accessible by all within the institution provides a way for those in the middle to rethink their leader role and gain confidence and capital.

Relational Roles and Networks

As part of thinking differently about those leading in the middle, how leaders are identified needs to change. In the pivotal role as boundary spanners (Aldrich & Herker, 1977), middle leaders who engage with counterparts in other colleges and in the community help bring back information into the institution and help translate ideas to fit the community college context. This infusion of ideas occurs when campus members attend conferences or training sessions and then learn how to implement the new practice within the setting of their own college and meet their institution’s needs. In the era of networking, nimbleness and an adaptive nature to address the issues facing community colleges build organizational flexibility (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009), and middle leaders can leverage their relational abilities in this adaptive process (Branson et al., 2016).

Presently, the ability to build relationships differs from in the past as the necessary relationships required in higher education are broader, with new partners, and occur across cultural borders (Eddy & Amey, 2014). Those in middle leadership ranks may act as boundary spanners and connectors who provide key links both within the institution and with external stakeholders. Similar to the mid-level administrator in Watson’s (2007) study, those working in the middle have a different range of connections and relationships as they interact with others both up, down, and outside the organizational hierarchy. This type of connection is important to bringing both information and perspectives to decision-making. Attention to those leading in the middle focuses primarily on individual efforts that draw on the ability of relationship building skills (DeChurch, Hiller, Murase, Doty, & Salas, 2010). These individuals serve as critical nodes of connection and in these roles help make meaning in often chaotic situations (Levin, 2017). In these times of fiscal exigency, boundary spanners take on heightened roles of importance. For example, department chairs have experienced broadening responsibilities as community colleges flattened their middle management (Fattig, 2013). As Fattig found, individuals tapped often are those who fill leadership voids, but these new leaders need leadership training and mentoring to support these changing roles.

Networked leadership requires nurturing more cross-boundary connections and relationships—both personally and institutionally (Amey, 1999; Watson, 2007). Working across organizational sectors to build partnerships requires the ability of

leaders to connect with others through outreach and relationships, and draws on levels of social capital (Eddy & Amey, 2014). At the heart of roles for middle leaders is a constant “negotiation amidst networks of professional and power relations” (Branson et al., 2016, p. 129). In this environment, relationships draw on the social capital and power of the individuals involved in negotiations within relationships. As power within institutions becomes ubiquitous, those in the middle are in a unique location to leverage power and to rely on trust and credibility, building relationships constructed of influence and persuasion rather than organizational position.

Research by Branson and colleagues (2016) concluded that “the middle leader’s role in higher education must be reconceived as being fundamentally and unquestionably relational in its entirety” (p. 142). Yet, those in the middle whose influence builds from relational and networked roles exist within an organizational context and culture. For example, when the Aspen Institute (2016) provided feedback to Halifax Community College in rural North Carolina, the visiting site team advocated for the creation of a cross-functional team to bridge academics and student affairs. The current organizational reporting structure creates barriers to more collaboration across functional units. Increasingly, programs such as Completion by Design (www.completionbydesign.org/) and Achieving the Dream (<http://achievingthedream.org/>) advocate for tighter functional area connections and information sharing, drawing attention to the need for mid-level leaders to accomplish goals of these initiatives. Faculty members and mid-level leaders take on heightened roles as sharing information regarding students becomes more central to mapping student progression within the community college. The interplay between agency and structure (Giddens, 1984) requires ongoing learning by middle leaders and organizational learning within the institution (Branson et al., 2016; Kezar, 2013).

Developing middle leaders begins with these individuals “seeing” work assignments as opportunities and taking advantage of them. Individual learning occurs within larger communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the opportunities to be engaged with others whose perspectives and institutional responsibilities vary. Not only do these assignments allow increased boundary spanning for the middle leader, but they provide opportunity to increase knowledge, build networks and bridges for individuals, units, and the colleges writ large. Recognizing these as more than just tasks but as leadership capacity building experiences is a change in mindset for those working in the middle with a conception of their work as only managerial in orientation. But, nurtured, the promotion of greater leader capacity and networking for mid-level administrators can occur (Reichard & Johnson, 2011).

When we move beyond hierarchical views of leadership, it becomes easier to see leadership throughout the institution. Simple changes in language from “leader,” which may connote only a few in the college to “educator” or “champion,” serve to change perceptions and expand role identities symbolically. Focusing on relationships and networks helps create a stronger sense of belongingness on campus (Strayhorn, 2012).

Valuing the voice of middle leaders helps move institutions beyond simple tallying of individual contributions to the college and instead enables thinking about collective responsibilities (Branson et al., 2016). Both scholarly efforts to conceptualize mid-level leadership (Amey, 1999; Eddy et al., 2016) and implementation of expanded recognition of mid-level administrators as leaders need to occur.

CONCLUSIONS

The old structures and ways of operating at community colleges are no longer tenable in these times of declining resources and changing student demographics. Colleges can no longer afford to be all things to all people (Vaughan, 2004), and the increased focus on completion, even if using ill-conceived metrics, has heightened public attention on community colleges. Among many competing and critical issues facing the colleges, the college completion movement requires attention to student progress and attainment, and in instances such as this, attention turns to campus leadership (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). As highlighted in this chapter, in times of crisis, historically, we turned to top-level leadership for action (Kotter, 2014; Roueche et al., 2014). While crisis may seem a bit drastic, we argue that it is time to reconceive the role of middle leaders and to change the organizational architecture of community colleges to take advantage of all talent as a response to increased organizational complexity and ongoing challenges.

Scant theorizing on middle leaders has occurred in community colleges (Branson et al., 2016; Fletcher, 2004). Attention to team-based leadership began to acknowledge that others beyond positional leaders could contribute to the mission of the college (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993), but in these models, reliance on singular leaders pulling the strings was evident (Day et al., 2004). The K-12 sector instead has placed more effort on distributed and shared leadership over the past 20 years (Jones et al., 2012), and it is now time for higher education to catch up. In an earlier work, Eddy (2010) argued for multidimensional leadership, and we have advanced this concept into networked leadership. This dynamic model builds on individual leader schema and showcases how a range of attributes may contribute to effective leadership, and highlights the need for institutional fit (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). This model assumes ongoing learning by leaders to allow for adjustments within external environments even while the level of leadership is not defined. In more recent work, Eddy et al. (2015) posited that networked leadership begins to move past thinking of leadership as a singular effort, highlighting linkages both within institutions and across sectors, building on partnerships (Amey & Eddy, 2014) and making use of boundary spanners (Bess & Dee, 2008). “Networked leaders must not only understand the importance of distributing power throughout the organization, but they must also know how to digest and interpret information for decision making” (Eddy et al., 2015, p. 119). Here, relationships become critical for the network.

Fulfilling the promise of networked leadership, however, requires fundamental change in most of the ways we think about leadership organizationally and structurally, as well as individually and collectively. Changes to leadership development programs and graduate programs provide one means to think differently about middle leaders (Eddy & Garza Mitchell, in press). Linked to leadership development is a need to contemplate succession planning, especially as the need to fill leadership positions becomes increasingly critical as more positions are opening up relative to the past (Bornstein, 2010). Because of pressures on community colleges facing a leadership void, the time is ripe for reconfiguring the organizational structure to align with networked leadership operating in a matrix organization (McPhail, 2016).

Increased agency for those leading in the middle begins to offer new ways to conceive of their leadership identity as well (Sluss et al., 2011). Middle leaders need to move beyond conceptions of managerial roles; they need to think and act instead like leaders. These individuals become the interpreters of information, and help contribute to the framing of the needs of the institution (Fairhurst, 2011). When the role of middle leadership is conceptualized for its boundary-spanning capabilities and when middle leaders are seen for the relational roles they provide the college, enhanced outcomes will occur for the individual and the college.

Top-level leaders and boards of trustees must embrace the notion of sharing power in the institution in order to achieve greater outcomes. Shared governance processes are challenged in part by resource constraints and neoliberal policies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Gerber, 2014; Kater, 2017), but recent attention to the need for more intra-institutional coordination, such as that advocated by programming by Completion by Design (see www.completionbydesign.org/), brings increased attention to the value of working together across institutional leadership levels. The push for performance-based funding (Mullin et al., 2015) puts a fine-point on the need to link leadership with institutional outcomes. Increases in the leadership capacity of community colleges provide these institutions with potential to recast their operations in ways to promote better student outcomes, economic development for communities, and pathways to universities. Middle leaders provide a critical linchpin in efforts to improve community college operations.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can institutional leaders change organizational structures in ways to become more inclusive of middle leaders?
2. What theories of power and politics apply to middle leaders in community colleges?
3. In what ways has unionization affected how we conceptualize middle-leader roles?
4. How can individual agency contribute to expanded conceptions of leadership?

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