

Connecting through Mentoring:  
Improving Workplace Connections through Peer-to-Peer Interactions

by

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## ABSTRACT

Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis – McChord (PCJBLM) is a community college extension campus that is challenged with complying with multiple policies while serving a transient student population amid budget constraints. Through multiple cycles of research, entry-level student services staff expressed concern about their professional development and their ability to contribute meaningfully to initiatives around student success. Student services staff were also concerned with their connection to colleagues and leaders within the unit. Research shows that leaders may need to be more flexible and creative in staff development to appreciate the diverse values and talents of their teams. Research also identifies professional development as essential to solidifying student affairs as a profession and meeting the demands of today’s educational environment.

Through multiple cycles of research, peer-to-peer mentoring was identified as the innovation to address the problem of practice at PCJBLM. The program was evaluated as part of an action research study. The theoretical perspectives guiding of the study were wicked problems, theory of structural empowerment, theory of psychological empowerment, and social learning theory and communities of practice. Peer-to-peer mentoring was evaluated over eight-weeks. Participants were selected via purposeful sampling. Key artifacts produced by participants were reflective journals and an individual development plan (IDP). Multiple qualitative data sources were used to triangulate the results. The quantitative instrument, Conditions of Work Empowerment Questionnaire – II (CWEQ-II), was administered to support learning about the participants’ feelings and perceptions about empowerment. The pre- and post-test (CWEQ-II) measures were used in conjunction with the qualitative sources. Credibility

and rigor were addressed through triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking.

Results indicate more investigation is needed to address the identified wicked problem. Peer-to-peer mentoring supported a broadened view of the problem practice. The peer-to-peer mentoring program was structurally empowering while not completely psychologically empowering. The participants' conflicts related to psychological empowerment were identified and will support continued learning in this area. Additionally, through multiple cycles of qualitative analysis, the values of this unit were identified. These values were essential to the developing community of practice. Continued research in empowerment and wicked problems is needed to support the future growth of the community of practice.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, James Howard and Vera Louise Lett. These individuals became my guardians not by force or accident but by choice. Their work ethic and drive to be more and have more than their circumstances dictated are what sustained me and pushed beyond my limits during this program. My father passed on four months before I started the program. My mother passed in 2017 before I started my second year in the program. They were not formally educated, and they never had the chance. Times were different in Alabama. They fought to have a life anyway. I had many more affordances. They found a way to live in their time. I am finding a way in mine. I stand on their shoulders.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

According to Knight (2014), community colleges are operating in an environment with an increased focus on excellence. Excellence is achieved through continual iterations of right actions within a work environment. It is essential that student affairs leaders understand and embrace the complexity of today's workplace. They are charged with the development of collaborative interactions that maximize effectiveness. Cressey, Exton, and Totterdill (2013) assert that professional development and workplace learning have transitioned from external training prior to 1990 to a culture of reflective practice in the 2000s. Researchers have also found value in social interactions. However, these studies using quantitative methods have demonstrated the general challenge. We now need a more qualitative approach to fully ascertain and address the changing workplace environment in order to achieve excellence. Action research that employs qualitative principles and innovations has been the most appropriate research approach for capturing these conversations (Cressey et al., 2013).

One can identify the related challenges in the student-affairs literature. Culp and Helfgot (2005) state that as the student affairs profession has grown since the 1960s, some core competencies have been identified as essential to student success. These core values include the following: access and opportunity for all students; holistic student development; quality services to support student growth; valuing all students; creating a culture where students can learn and grow; and an understanding that the experience outside of the classroom adds enrichment to the college experience. The authors identify 11 key values that are critical in the success of student affairs initiatives that may

improve student success. Two of these essential elements are at the heart of this study – a collaborative institutional culture and a valued and well-trained staff. Culp and Helfgot (2005) further state that student affairs leaders must partner with key stakeholders and their staff members to develop professional development action plans that focus on essential skill acquisition. There are several tools that may support execution of these professional development plans. This study utilizes mentoring as one of the identified tools for skill development and reflection on individual growth and improving professional practice (Culp & Helfgot, 2005). Mentoring will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter and in the chapters that follow.

### **Local Context**

Pierce College is a two-campus community-college district operating primarily in the Lakewood and Puyallup areas of Washington State with a district chancellor and a president at each location. The original campus is a 15 minute-drive from the military base. Therefore, we have had a consistent presence within the military community for more than 50 years. Our locations at Joint Base Lewis – McChord (JBLM) are at the McChord Education Center and at Lewis Main, in the Stone Education Center. We work within what is called a college mall in these education centers, and both of these offices are led by a single executive director who represents the larger home college. The college mall is a grouping of higher education institutions that have agreed to support the active-duty service members and their families stationed at a specific military installation. Within this agreement between the armed services and the colleges is an understanding that these institutions will provide programs that have several characteristics: low residency requirements; consistent service availability; unique programs that support the

improvement of military personnel as war fighters and eventual civilians; and acceptance of all applicable forms of transfer credit. Many of colleges that are members of the JBLM education centers' college malls are primarily located outside of Washington. Therefore, Pierce College has the advantage of being one of a few local colleges or universities that are located on base in support of military-affiliated students, family members, and student veterans. We have been affiliated with the military since our inception in 1967, and we have become the largest college or university operation on Joint Base Lewis - McChord. We support more students, and in large part we operate as our own separate entity.

Thus, I work in an unorthodox educational environment. I am the director of student success and outreach at our extended learning site. I direct advising, marketing, and outreach efforts at two military education centers where the two installations are connected by a recently-constructed bridge. We provide complete student services, online and face-to-face instruction, financial aid services, disability support services, and veterans educational benefits services. These services are packed into tiny cubicle-laden offices where we serve more than 3,100 students worldwide.

Our structure is comprised of our executive director, dean of student success and testing services, dean of instruction, director of student success and outreach, and director of enrollment and testing services. Our staff includes four student success coaches (advisors), three registration specialists, one registration support supervisor, one registration program coordinator, one testing coordinator, and one administrative assistant. We have four permanent faculty coordinators and a host of adjunct faculty members. Our fiscal team is not in our direct academic structure but operates permanently at our site to support students specifically at JBLM. We also offer rotating

services from financial aid (one FA coordinator), veterans educational benefits services (one certifying official), and access and disability services (one program manager).

In addition to serving a large military-affiliated student population, Pierce College is also an Achieving the Dream (ATD) leader college. Achieving the Dream is an organization that supports community colleges in improving student success through the strategic use of disaggregated data focusing on improving equity and engagement in services and overall student care leading to increased retention and completion (Achieving the Dream [ATD], n.d.). In taking on this new data-driven approach, staff members have responded with a demand for professional development around these ATD initiatives and more explanation as to how these adjustments in approach will affect their daily work. Moreover, becoming an ATD member and leader college has forced us to review our mission, vision, and core themes. In doing so, training and professional development at the supervisory and staff levels have been identified as significant needs throughout the college including Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis – McChord.

### **Problem of Practice**

The staff concerns about the ATD initiative provide the context for a broader problem of practice around the role of student affairs staff. How do we transition from a traditional hierarchal system to create a more empowering work structure that offers opportunities for collaborative problem formulation and resolution? Currently, leaders determine the challenges that exist within our unit. In most instances, entry-level staff are not given an opportunity to contribute. When the opportunities are presented, some staff members have expressed concern that they are not prepared to have these conversations. Concerns about the ATD initiative reflect this broader dynamic.

Previous iterations of research have echoed this sentiment. During my initial exploratory research, I broadly investigated the work environment at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. I gathered survey data and one-to-one interview data in an effort to capture the feelings and perceptions of staff members within our student services unit. The purpose of this initial exploration was to develop an understanding of the perceived challenges and professional growth needs from the staff members' perspective. From the findings, I identified three key outcomes. First, staff members are committed to Pierce College and the students we serve. Second, staff members do not feel consistently empowered to make routine discretionary decisions within their areas of work. Third, staff members identified supervisor feedback and a more well-defined professional development program as pivotal to their professional growth.

Based upon the outcomes of the exploratory study, I continued my investigation of our student services unit at Pierce College at JBLM. The focus of the second iteration was employee development. During this iteration, I administered a survey focusing on staff development, staff recognition and appreciation, and staff-to-supervisor relations. There were three key outcomes from this study. First, staff members were satisfied with the level of recognition and appreciation. Second, they expressed concern in the area of initial training and ongoing development. Specifically, participants expressed concern with the perceived lack of complete training. They expressed a desire to work alongside a knowledgeable other for a more extended period of time prior to being asked to fully engage with students on their own. Third, they expressed a desire for an individualized career path that may prepare them for the next career move.

Based upon the outcomes of the second phase of exploration, I identified peer-to-peer mentoring as an appropriate response to staff member concerns and requests. In spring 2017, I piloted a peer-to-peer mentoring and reflection program to learn how such a program may support a reshaping of the work environment such that it may become more responsive to employees' needs for social connections and career progression. Specifically, unit feedback to this point aligns with an employee desire for the following: more meaningful connections within the workplace, a more well-defined employment path that incorporates employees' future professional aspirations, and more consistent constructive feedback from supervisors. The mentoring program was conducted over a four-week period. Data was collected through recorded group interactions, researcher observations and field notes, and individual reflective journaling. There were four key outcomes to this study. First, the small group setting encouraged sharing. Second, the individual reflections supported their growth and confidence in their career aspirations. Third, the program was too short. The participants felt that they were just scratching the surface. Fourth, participants wanted to take a deeper dive into their career aspirations and an opportunity to challenge each other more. The lessons learned from these three phases will be incorporated into the peer-to-peer mentoring program in this study. See Figure 1.



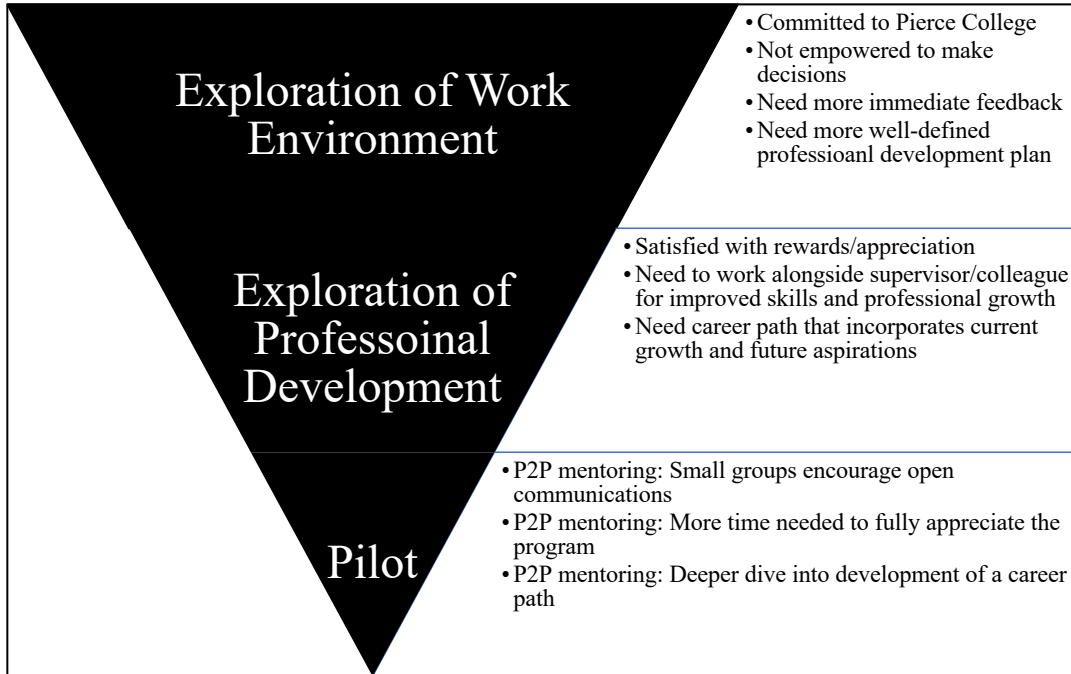


Figure 1. Previous cycles of action research

### Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how peer-to-peer mentoring may be used as a vehicle to improve workplace connections, improve interactions with military affiliated students, and support ongoing initiatives within the larger college. Peer-to-peer mentoring may provide leaders with an opportunity to leverage the unique worldviews of a multicultural work unit in order to improve practice. Our problem of practice is an issue of work environment. Specifically, I have identified from participant feedback thus far staff members' desire for the following: more meaningful connections within the workplace, a more well-defined employment path that incorporates employees' future professional aspirations, and more consistent constructive feedback from supervisors. Succinctly, how do we transition our work environment from one of high command and

control to one of empowerment with more interconnected relations among all contributors within the unit, i.e. fellow staff members, administrators, and students?

### **Innovation**

Peer-to-peer mentoring was evaluated in this study to investigate how peer-to-peer connections may support *cross-department understanding, professional development, and fulfillment of institutional outcomes*. In the peer-to-peer mentoring program, I used group discussions, reflective journaling, partnered work, and one focus group interview to frame interactions over an eight-week period. The peer-to-peer mentoring program at JBLM may have supported fulfillment of institutional core themes. Pierce College District has five identified institutional core themes. The two institutional core themes being investigated in this study are excellence, on the one hand, and equity, diversity, and inclusion, on the other hand. These two core themes are defined below:

*Excellence:* Pierce College District will ensure quality, sustainability and continuous improvement in all of its departments and programs (Pierce College Mission, n.d.).

*Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:* Pierce College will promote an equitable, diverse environment for teaching, learning, and working, with collaborative decision-making and mutual respect (Pierce College Mission, n.d.).

For the purposes of this innovation, I consider cross-departmental understanding to be a relationship built among professionals within different departments that engenders more effective communications and stronger workplace connections. Group members also develop a more meaningful appreciation for the work of their peers. Additionally, participation in peer interactions may support partnerships and encourage group members to expand their thinking beyond their specific role, duties, and job-specific tasks. I defined professional development as the learning that enhances knowledge, skills, and abilities. Additionally, peer interactions may have supported both personal and

professional growth with an eye toward mastery of a current role or position and/or preparation for the next career opportunity. The peer-to-peer mentoring program was discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

### **Desired Impact**

The desired impact of the study and its innovation was to lay the groundwork for an organization that learns to evaluate itself critically. This may begin with evaluating our deficiencies as opportunities for growth within our practice. With participation in peer-to-peer mentoring, staff members may have had an opportunity to visualize their connection to our institutional outcomes, appreciate their value in the strategic plans, and feel more accountable in their roles. Finally, the hope was that leaders would be able to have higher quality dialogue with team members with improved development plans that incorporate institutional objectives with career aspirations.

### **Research Questions**

Leaders of the Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) student services unit may have an opportunity to create environments that facilitate the desired actions that may lead to the accomplishment of organizational objectives. In the chapters that follow, I discussed the guiding principles of Rittel and Webber's (1973) wicked problems, Kanter's (1977) theory of structural empowerment, Zimmerman's (1990) theory of psychological empowerment, and Wenger's (1998) social learning theory and communities of practice to further explain the problem of practice and the opportunities practice-level improvements. These theories were discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. This was an action research study. Through evaluation of peer-to-peer mentoring at JBLM, I answered the following research questions:

1. Wicked problems – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program encourage a transition from an environment of predetermined problems and solutions by management to a collaborative culture of inquiry and problem resolution?
2. Engagement/empowerment – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program support the redistribution of power dynamics within student services?
3. Communities of practice – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, where and when does participation in a peer-mentoring program engender greater mutual support of colleagues and understanding of team roles, and encourage sharing of workplace artifacts that might improve practice?

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE PROJECT

I discussed the theoretical perspectives and research guiding the study in six sections. In the first section, literature related to wicked problems, empowerment, and communities of practice were identified as essential theories for this study. In the second section, literature relating to the evolution of the workplace and how it affects student services units within community colleges was discussed. Additional literature was presented detailing the professional development challenges facing community college units and identifying peer-to-peer mentoring as a viable option for addressing these challenges. In the third section, I presented information specific to mentoring programs that addressed both opportunities and challenges within higher education contexts. In the fourth section, the peer-to-peer mentoring program was discussed as an innovation to address the professional development needs of a student services unit at Pierce College at JBLM. In the fifth section, I presented the lessons learned from previous research by detailing what I learned from participant interactions. As part of my discussion of these previous cycles, I provided a rationale for implementing a peer-to-peer mentoring program as an appropriate next step. Finally, I conclude chapter two with a summary of the theoretical perspectives and previous research. I also provided a discussion of the implications and benefits of the study.

#### **Theoretical Perspectives**

In this section, theories around wicked problems, empowerment, and communities of practice were discussed. The applicability of these theories to the work environment within higher education was included in this discussion. Additionally, related research in

empowerment and communities of practice were presented to depict how previous researchers have operationalized these concepts in practice.

### **Wicked Problems**

I chose to present the identified problem of practice at Pierce College at JBLM through the lens of wicked problems to address the top-down approach to interactions between leaders and staff. From the previous exploration of the work environment, I identified an opportunity within our work environment. The environment at JBLM may be improved through developing more collaborative spaces for practice-level innovations.

Rittel and Webber (1973) introduced the expression *wicked problems* to define the complex circumstances of problems in a way that traditional social or hard science cannot. Traditional social or hard science approaches often assume a straightforward explanation of problems and cannot adequately resolve social issues. Clear answers to social issues may be unlikely because these problems are often affected by the current context and social constructs surrounding the problem. In fact, resolving one issue may reveal or cause another. Moreover, what may work for one individual or group may be insufficient for others. Outcomes reached may not be judged as true or false but rather as good or bad dependent upon the context. According to Jordan, Kleinsasser, and Roe (2014), one outcome is certain, the solutions applied to the situation will have a permanent effect on the setting. Becker (2007) offers further explanation in her discussion of the 10 primary components of wicked problems. These 10 components are as follows: wicked problems cannot be defined conclusively; wicked problems have no clear solution; outcomes for wicked problems are characterized as true/false rather than good/bad; wicked problems have no definitive test for the effectiveness of resolutions;

while some aspects of a resolution may be transferable, resolutions are specific to the problem being addressed; wicked problems do not have infinite resolutions; each problem has unique characteristics; each problem is a symptom of another problem; there may be multiple parties involved with the resolution; and the designer of the resolution has no cause to be wrong. Crafters of the resolution should not expect to address the problem appropriately in the first attempt.

I framed my problem of practice as a wicked problem based upon how problems are formed and addressed JBLM and the participant reactions to this approach during previous cycles of research. Leaders determine the challenges that exist within our unit. We then work within our small group to determine the solutions to these problems. These problems or challenges within our work environment are often determined and addressed without entry-level staff input. We then implement what we think is the appropriate action to address these problems. The adoption of the implemented plan by staff members is forced through prescriptive notifications. We then create an environment of consequence the staff member is held accountable for noncompliance. Consequences include poor performance coaching sessions followed by a counseling session. If noncompliance continues, a letter of reprimand is given with the next step being termination.

This approach to problem formulation and with corrective actions for noncompliance has not produced the empowered work unit that we seek. Other consequences may include staff members developing feelings of underappreciation intellectually and in some cases becoming less connected to organizational objectives. Leaders may also inadvertently reduce the positional relevance of entry-level staff

members by not providing adequate opportunity for professional growth in areas such as practice-level decision making, collaboration, and strategic thinking. Specifically, leaders may not adequately support professionals with opportunities to address small-scale problems with their collective intellectual tools. Finally, leaders may place an inordinate level of pressure upon the administrative team to identify all problems and develop all solutions. In doing so, leaders may miss opportunities to coach and mentor staff members and develop trust within the teams.

If leaders at Pierce College at JBLM were able to create spaces for collective dialogue where appropriate, they may reduce unproductive behaviors. These unproductive behaviors may include absenteeism, late arrival, hostile communications, withdrawal, and increased turnover. The absenteeism and late arrival may disrupt the normal business flow, which impacts other team members and the delivery of services to students. The hostile work communications may lead to imbalance as the manager or supervisor may devote more time to addressing the issues of the noncompliant worker at the expense of the professional development of workers who meet expectations. Increased turnover may result in lost time and resources in training, reduced services as the organization fills positions and minimal managerial availability due to hiring duties and training new hires.

### **Empowerment**

In addition to framing the problem of practice as a wicked problem, I identified empowerment theory as an essential theoretical lens. Zimmerman (1990) described two forms of empowerment: individually oriented conceptions of empowerment and psychological empowerment. According to the author, individually oriented conceptions



of empowerment treats empowerment as a component of one's personality and fails to acknowledge environmental influence. In this study, I focused on the latter, psychological empowerment. Psychological empowerment is a contextually-based phenomenon that grapples with the fit between individual and environment. It includes several key factors, such as collective action, skill development, and cultural awareness. It also encompasses additional psychological factors to include motivation to control, locus of control, and self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 1990).

I also included Kanter's (1977) theory of structural empowerment to address shaping the environment for more empowered relations in practice. According to Kanter's (1977) theory of structural empowerment, empowerment is stimulated within organizations that offer the appropriate access to information and resources, managerial and team support, and varying opportunities to learn and develop. Further, empowerment begins with the modification of organizational structure. Kanter posits that this redefining the environment is fundamental to the employee empowerment and engagement. Leveling hierarchal systems along with removing barriers to decision making through the expansion of *official authority* is an essential strategy. Its values include increasing the power element of work life for entry-level employees. Specifically, it enables entry-level decision making with respect to "non-routine, discretionary, and visible aspects" (p. 276). It offers improved managerial interaction to shorten the decision-making process and facilitate more effective communications. Moreover, there are multiple virtues to empowered organizations, including an ability to reduce the debilitating aspects of powerlessness, such as low morale, procedural bureaucracy, and issues around departmental or sectional control. Additional benefits include more expedient decisions and an opportunity to capitalize on innovations. Finally, a commitment to empowerment

and a leveled hierarchy may support development of more effective managers including those who are members of underrepresented groups (Kanter, 1977).

In a previous study by Cho, Laschinger, and Wong (2006) investigating workplace empowerment, engagement and commitment, Kanter's (1977, 1993) theory of structural power in organizations and Maslach and Leiter's (1997) six areas of work life and work engagement/burnout was evaluated. Cho, Laschinger, and Wong (2006) focused on how to retain new nurses and improve job satisfaction. In the wake of substantial turnover due to mass turnover of retiring experienced nursing, the authors investigated how to retain new nurses through improved job satisfaction and reduced instances of burnout. At the time of the study, retaining qualified nurses was a key goal in Canada. There was an anticipated shortage of 78,000 nursing by 2011 (Cho, et al., 2006).

High-quality care for patients necessitates retention of a fully trained and engaged nursing workforce. However, managers of new nurses were encountering elevated rates of absenteeism as nurses were overwhelmed by inadequate resources and excessive workloads (Cho, et al., 2006). With an impending nursing shortage, a new focus on developing supportive work environments became critical to retention efforts. The authors used Kanter's (1977, 1993) empowerment model to support their understanding of how empowering work structures may contribute to more favorable organizational outcomes for new employees. According to Kramer (1974), new employees may experience a "reality shock" when their perceived workplace experience does not align with the realities of the workplace.

Kanter (1977) posits that empowering workplace configurations impact employee attitudes and behaviors. Empowered employees display increased motivation in doing

their work and they can derive meaning from their daily work activities. Further, Kanter states that empowering organizations eliminate barriers to progress through increased access to job-related resources, relevant information, professional and personal support, and professional development. Cho et al. (2006) also wove Maslach and Leiter's (1997) six areas of work life and work engagement/burnout into Kanter's model. The six areas of work life include workload, control, rewards, community, fairness, and values. Maslach and Leiter (1997) postulated that work engagement and burnout are at opposing ends of the spectrum. They defined burnout as a *psychosomatic* pattern characterized by *exhaustion*, *cynicism*, and *inefficacy*. The focus of Cho's, Laschinger's, and Wong's study was nursing engagement/burnout (Cho, et al. 2006).

Cho et al.'s (2006) results supported the author's claim that empowering structures had a significant impact on work engagement and organizational commitment. Particularly, new nursing hires expressed that participation in an empowering environment increased fit within the six areas of work life. Employee fit improved engagement and led to reduced instances of burnout. This change along the continuum led to increased engagement. This was the first study conducted combining Kanter's theory of structural empowerment with Maslach and Leiter's six areas of work life. This study supported the expanded model (Cho, et al., 2006).

Sutton and Rao (2014) provided further support to Kanter (1977) and Zimmerman's (1990) theories of empowerment. According to the authors, hiring strong talent is not enough to achieve organizational objectives. No matter the level of capability, employees need adequate support, opportunities for growth, and consistent feedback to thrive. Many educators leave their universities and colleges due to poor

professional development and often express feelings of being undervalued and underutilized in their roles. Cultivating organizational talent and creating a professionally nurturing environment may be critical to moving forward with organizational objectives (Sutton & Rao, 2014).

Zimmerman (1990) discussed the key factors to psychological empowerment that researchers should consider when attempting to investigate the phenomenon. These factors include external and internal influences that impact how a person may be liberated or inhibited within a given environment. Kanter (1977) details strategy for creating more empowering organizations. Leveling the hierarchal structure is the first step to producing more empowerment and engagement. Too much structure impacts empowerment and engagement within an organization in several ways. First, it minimizes the effectiveness of its leaders. Also, extreme oversight may contribute to confused communications and delayed decision making. Finally, supervisors may be reduced to schedule makers and rule enforcers.

Kanter (1977) suggested that supervisor roles could be made more effective by developing trust relationships between entry-level workers such that supervisors and employees may feel more confident in front-line decision making. This change would allow supervisors more opportunity to engage in strategic activities such as employee evaluation and professional development that may support sustained performance and review of practice or operation to address inefficiencies. Additionally, Sutton and Rao's (2014) viewpoint further support those of Zimmerman (1990) and Kanter (1977). According to the authors, it is not enough to hire talented individuals. Organizations must commit to training its supervisors to be more responsive to the needs of employees.

Specifically, it is important that employees see how their roles are being appreciated in the current and future organizational objectives. Using a guilt-prone leadership approach may help leaders to self-evaluate, investigate their practice, and identify opportunities for improvement in this area. Employee engagement may be directly related to the level of value, trust, and control they feel within the work environment.

I have identified empowerment as an essential element of addressing the problem of practice at Pierce College at JBLM with the idea that empowered teams begin with empowered individuals. Just as leaders must value the collective talents of their team and build a culture of trust, individual staff members must be able to value their skills and abilities and develop trust in their own judgment. A key element of addressing wicked problems is creating a culture of empowered individuals such that information may flow freely, and problems may be addressed with collective resolutions. To get there, leaders and their team members may need to feel emancipated in questioning traditional approaches and assumptions and in developing collegial relationships where all contributions are valued and counted as pivotal to the achievement goals.

### **Communities of Practice**

The third theoretical lens I used is Wenger's (1998) social theory of social learning and the related concept of communities of practice. Wenger proposed a social theory of learning that is built upon four guiding principles. First, people are social beings, and in his view, this is the primary feature of learning. Second, acquisition of knowledge builds competence as it relates to the situated context. Third, knowing involves participation in shared enterprises. Participation in these shared enterprises

occur through being an active participant in the world. Finally, learning helps people develop meaning with respect to the world and their engagement within it.

Communities of practice comprise Wenger's (1998) core idea for advancing practice in a social context. According to Wenger, communities of practice are not simply a group of individuals discussing various topics or participating in a myriad of activities. CoPs are built upon competent membership. The three components to competent membership are mutuality of engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. *Mutuality of engagement* is the ability to build relationships based upon engagement with members and reciprocating actions. Membership is based upon social status, organizational membership, or personal relationships with people. Identity is established through participation. *Joint enterprise* is the ability to adequately grasp the enterprise, take responsibility for it, and participate in the negotiation of the community's continued pursuit. *Shared repertoire* refers to routines, words, tools, experiences, tips, stories, and ideas that have been adopted during the communities' existence.

Communities of practice (CoP) are everywhere and can take on many shapes, sizes, and meanings; and they exist in varied contexts. As CoP's relate to an organization, workers construct their professional lives in order adequately engage with their colleagues and patrons in order to meet organizational objectives. Over time, they develop a professional and even a personal identity that enables them to meet employer requirements and customer demands. No matter their job description, to meet organizational needs, employees develop a practice that facilitates accomplishment of their required tasks. Therefore, for organizations, learning is a matter of developing and

maintaining *interconnected* communities of practice through which organizational knowledge flows effectively and communicates organizational value (Wenger, 1998).

Hodgkinson-Williams, Slay, and Sieborger (2007) introduced the components of communities of practice within higher education institutions to evaluate and interpret social interactions in the process of teaching and learning. The authors stated that learning does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, learning occurs within a social context with all the affordances of history, customs, and perceptions that may exist within a given social environment or society. Additionally, communities of practice are sources of participant knowledge, experience, and competence. This opportunity to share with each other may lead to deeper meaning making both individually and collectively.

Hodgkinson-Williams et al. (2007) conducted a study called the e-Yethu project in South Africa to explore how collective engagement between higher education academics and students, teachers within the community, and actors from local governmental and non-governmental agencies grew into a community of practice. This development contributed to the rise of information and communication technologies (ICT) initiatives in several schools in the Grahamstown District, South Africa. The authors assert that ICTs support expanding the learning experience beyond the bounds of traditional individualized educational experiences. The authors used the influences of Wenger's (1998) communities of practice, social constructivism, and Hoadley and Kilner's (2007) C4P model to demonstrate how communities of practice support knowledge share and knowledge generation regarding ICTs. They sought to demonstrate how these influences support higher education institutions (HEIs) in understanding how information communication technologies encourage collaborative learning within HEIs

and promote stronger relationships between HEIs and the local community (Hodgkinson-Williams et al., 2007).

The findings were interpreted through the lens of Hoadley's and Kilner's (2007) C4P model. The C4P model consists of five primary components: purpose, content, conversations, connections and context. Purpose is potentially the most essential of the five elements. It encourages engagement and provides the foundation for the content and conversations that follow. Content establishes the topics that will be discussed. Conversations involves the sharing of information amongst two or more persons and it bonds all the other elements. The authors note that without conversation, knowledge can only be shared. However, new knowledge cannot be generated. Connections support conversations and context through its inherent relationship building. Context establishes relevance. Expounding upon existing knowledge cannot occur without context (Hodgkinson-Williams, Sieborger, & Slay 2007).

While Hodgkinson-Williams et al. (2007) did not highlight any limitations of this study, they did note that there is more work to be done to fully articulate the phenomenon. Still, the findings support the authors notion that communities of practices aid in the implementation and proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Additionally, if higher education institutions can break from tradition and view learning as an inherently social endeavor, they may be able to fully appreciate communities of practice and the provisions of ICTs in facilitating learning within the institution and engendering cooperative relationships within the community (Hodgkinson-Williams et al., 2007).



The preceding was a detailed discussion of wicked problems, empowerment, and communities of practice. In this discussion, I have detailed the potential impacts of these theories on practice. In the next discussion, I presented literature that offers a snapshot of the challenges facing community colleges and their leaders. The theories presented may be essential elements of an action-oriented study that may address these challenges.

### **Related Literature**

In the following subsections, I discussed some key challenges facing community college leaders with regard to team and individual employee development. These key challenges include an increased emphasis on excellence, a need for relevant career-focused development programs, and an increasingly more complex workforce. Each of these challenges can be discussed in greater detail individually. For the purposes of this study, they were being presented collectively to provide a broader depiction of the task at hand for community college leaders.

#### **Increased Emphasis on Excellence**

In today's community college environment, there is an increased emphasis on excellence. According to Knight (2014), excellence is achieved through continual iterations of right actions within a work environment. The excellence perspective is achieved through behaviors established within practice that will lead to immeasurable improvements in student learning. To achieve excellence, community college professionals must identify the behaviors and practices that represent right action. Development of the excellence perspective is contingent upon the professional development of student affairs professionals such that they are prepared to meet institutional expectations (Knight, 2014). Building excellence within student affairs

professionals requires exemplifying excellence, clear and thorough communications, establishing collegiality among colleagues, and providing opportunity. Knight (2014) suggested that professional development is essential to the development of excellence. Further, Marsh (2001) asserted that supervisors who appreciate the personal as well as the professional aspects of their employees' experiences support staff development and contribute to a more productive work environment.

To achieve institutional excellence, student services leaders must first appreciate the enhanced level of complexity and changed culture of communication within the 21st century workplace. Cressey, Exton, and Totterdill (2013) discuss how the professional development and workplace learning has transitioned from a focus on training prior to 1990 to a focus on organizational learning during the 1990s and then to an emphasis on productive reflection in the 2000s. Workplace social dialogue has been shifting over the past two decades. Qualitative case studies and innovations resulting from action research have been the most appropriate research activities for capturing these conversations. Studies using quantitative methods only capture breadth, but such studies do not capture the depth needed to fully explain the phenomenon. Cressey et al. describe what they call *productive reflection*, a term which references the multitude of spaces and varying levels within an organization where dialogue may occur. Full application of the organization's collective resources is required for the practice to reach its greatest potential. Further, social dialogue and personal reflection must employ some predetermined guidelines, which include valuing all contributors' views and the cultivating of trust relationships among all participants within an organization.

## **Increased Emphasis on Professional Development**

Culp and Helfgot (2005) stated that since the 1960s, student affairs practitioners have used a multitude of terms to describe themselves. These descriptions include compound terms such as *student-centered*, *client-centered*, *customer-centered*, and finally, *learning-centered*. The authors further noted that student affairs practitioners are also aware that community college students are learners, clients, students, and consumers. Subsequently, student affairs practitioners have retained some key core values throughout the growth of the profession. These core values included access and opportunity for all students, holistic student development, quality services to support student growth, valuing all students, creating a culture where students can learn and grow, and an understanding that the experience outside of the classroom adds enrichment to the college experience. Culp and Helfgot (2005) identified 11 essential factors that are critical in translating these values into programs that may lead to student success. These factors were supportive leadership, mission-driven organizational structure, data-based culture, adequate resources, collaborative institutional culture, student engagement, a valued and well-trained staff, effective partnerships, intelligent use of technology, and an emphasis on quality.

Two of these essential elements are at the heart of this study – a collaborative institutional culture and a valued and well-trained staff. Culp and Helfgot (2005) identified a significant concern of student affairs practitioners at all levels to be an inability to acquire the skills needed to develop and implement strategic plans or strengthen existing programs. It may be essential for student affairs leaders to partner with practitioners to build annual professional development plans that identify the skills

to be acquired and an action plan that details the acquisition of these skills. Learning opportunities that may support skill acquisition include in-service trainings, workshops, academic coursework, state and/or national conferences, and mentoring. This study utilized mentoring as a tool for skill development and reflection on individual growth and professional practice. Mentoring was discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

### **Identified Need to reduce Job Dissatisfaction**

In this section, job satisfaction was discussed to support the previous discussion of theoretical perspectives. Additionally, leaders' investment in professional development may support increased job satisfaction for entry-level employees at a community college on a joint military base. The amount of inputs entry-level team members are exposed to may have an impact on their level of connectedness, control and commitment. In the passages that follow, I provided a definition of job satisfaction and the key factors that may affect this phenomenon in practice.

**Defining and assessing job satisfaction.** There are several definitions of job satisfaction. The definition presented is only one of many as the definition has been evolving since the 1930s. Henne and Locke (1985) described job satisfaction as the favorable view of one's work following personal assessment and evaluation. According to Hulin and Judge (2003), job satisfactions are employees' *multidimensional* reactions to his/her work. Responses fall within three categories of evaluation: cognitive or evaluative, affective or emotional, and behavioral. The authors noted that the multidimensional responses might occur on a good-bad or positive-to-negative scale and they identified several assessment approaches that may support greater understanding of these three components.

**Job satisfaction in student affairs.** New student affairs professionals leave the field each year due to job dissatisfaction. Multiple factors have contributed to these early departures. These factors include: role ambiguity, role conflict, role orientation, role stress, job burnout, work overload, and career outlook. Career outlook factors have included professional goal attainment, professional development, and career advancement opportunities. The high attrition can be attributed to low morale and employee desire for ongoing professional development (Tull, 2006).

The organizational culture of higher education practices may positively or negatively impact professionals' intentions to turnover. New student affairs professionals need adequate introduction to the profession and the institution in order to properly mitigate the factors that may lead to turnover or psychological withdrawal from practice (Tull, 2006). Addressing these factors includes quality orientation and socialization into student affairs work. The orientation should include an introduction to the practice's professional behaviors, values, and relationships such that new professionals may assimilate within their new environment more quickly (Tull, 2006).

This literature was key to this study because it further supported ongoing development as a key component of retaining engaged and committed student affairs professionals. During previous cycles of research, team members from Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis – McChord asked for professional development and identified mentoring as key to their growing understanding of the profession. Mentoring may also provide a means for infusing the orientation and socialization identified in the job satisfaction research related to student affairs. Peer-to-peer mentoring was discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter.

## **Research related to Peer-to-Peer Mentoring**

In this section, mentoring was discussed in five sections. First, the difference between mentoring and coaching was presented. Second, I provided a discussion on the impact of mentoring on professional development. Third, I continued with a discussion of mentoring's impact on employee satisfaction. Fourth, I identified some potential benefits of mentoring. Finally, I provided a discussion on the drawbacks of mentoring.

**Distinguishing mentoring from coaching.** D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum (2003) defined mentoring as having several key elements including long term role modelling, counselling, support, and advocacy. By comparison, coaching was described as more well-defined goal-centric development over a shorter timeframe (Salter, 2015). Clutterbuck (2008) broadly categorized coaching and mentoring in the following manner: coaching most often seeks to help a coached individual grapple with a targeted facet of their life or work; mentoring is a long-term holistic developmental endeavor that supports career progression over time.

**Mentoring and professional development.** Continued professional development is contingent upon a commitment to lifelong learning, which is essential to sustaining the relevance of employee roles and work activities (Adanu, 2007; Alam, Kaliannan, & Puteh, 2014; Fear & Jones, 1994; Leader, 2003; Noon, 1994; Tan, 2005). To support continued professional development, it is crucial that organizations recognize the value of formal, non-formal, and informal learning (Alam et al., 2014; Anderson & Thomas 2006; Briggs & Sommefeldt, 2002; Conlon, 2004; Garrick, 1998; Smith, 2011). Informal learning is particularly useful in shaping an employee's commitment to lifelong learning through its unstructured curriculum, its basis in the people experience, and its impact on

an employee's constructed reality (Alam et al., 2014). With respect to informal learning, research has shown colleagues and supervisors to be more expedient reservoirs of contextual knowledge than formal organizational programs (Alam et al., 2014; Anderson & Thomas, 2006; Baruch & Bui, 2011; Eddy, Lorenzet, Smith-Jentsch, & Tannenbaum, 2005). Seasoned colleagues may provide rich contextual knowledge of the organization and its behaviors. However, how that knowledge is transferred requires further investigation (Alam et al., 2014).

**Mentoring and employee satisfaction.** From the literature, I gathered substantial evidence of the effectiveness of mentoring models. Particularly, mentored employees have shown greater professional commitment, increased engagement and improved promotion potential. Additionally, mentors also benefitted from having been the knowledgeable other within the relationship. Mentors have been shown to have an appreciation for the experience of imparting contextual knowledge onto to a junior colleague (Finney, MacDougall, & O'Neill, 2012).

**Potential benefits of peer mentoring.** Peer mentors can be valuable resources when dealing with daily operational issues. While leaders and supervisors remain pivotal to the accomplishment of organizational goals and aligning business practices with those goals, their position and the status associated with it may make them less approachable from an employee standpoint. Moreover, because knowledge, information, and power are disseminated disproportionately, leader and supervisor lead knowledge sharing often proves difficult. (Alam, Kaliannan, & Puteh 2014; Eddy, Lorenzet, Smith-Jentsch, & Tannenbaum, 2005). Further, the asymmetric nature of knowledge sharing, and conflicting power dynamics make colleague-to-colleague interactions more impactful in

day-to-day operations. Organizations can leverage the knowledge of senior employees in several ways. First, the relationship among colleagues is often a more natural relationship when compared to that of supervisors and supervised employees. Also, the knowledge of a senior colleague may fill in gaps that formal learning cannot begin to tackle. Finally, knowledge sharing may support increased employee interactions, which may strengthen interpersonal communications and allow for the free flow of information and support improvement in organizational effectiveness (Alam et al., & Puteh, 2014; Chong, Fong, Lee, Ooi, & Tan 2011; Lin, 2010).

**Potential challenges of peer mentoring.** While knowledge sharing provides rich opportunities for experiential learning in context, there are challenges with this peer-to-peer approach. According to Chiangmai (2005), many organizations implement some form of cooperative learning or knowledge sharing framework to support organizational learning. However, the success of these initiatives is contingent upon the willingness of the knowledge holder to share what they know with others (Alam, Kaliannan, & Puteh, 2014). Moreover, tacit knowledge is difficult to transfer. Most organizational knowledge is tacit knowledge and it resides with the individual and not the organization. If the knowledge holder derives power from ownership of this knowledge, it may be challenging to develop a culture of sharing among colleagues (Nonaka & Toyama, 2002; Alam et al., 2014). Therefore, it is incumbent upon organizations to encourage their employees to share their knowledge willingly (Alam et al., 2014).

**Peer-to-peer mentoring in higher education.** Peer-to-peer mentoring in higher education has been used primarily to support the entry-level learning for student workers as beginning professionals. However, after reviewing one such study, I identified this



mentoring approach as an appropriate form of mentoring to encourage relationship building, facilitate multiple forms of learning, and offer a safe space for connection within the student services unit at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis – McChord (JBLM).

In a previous research study, *peer meetings* were used to provide professional development to health science education students. Cohen-Shotanus, Dekker, Schaub-de Jong, and Verberk (2009) employed peer meetings with group dialogue and reflection to determine the impact on students' professional learning and behavior modifications. This was a phenomenographic qualitative study where students' learning experiences in *peer meetings* were analyzed through review of their learning portfolios. Results from this study revealed that the students benefitted from the interactive program by learning about themselves, developing their professional thinking, and identifying their skills as entry-level professionals (Cohen-Schotanus, M. A., Dekker, H., Schaub-de Jong, J., & Verkerk, M., 2009). These peer-to-peer interactions formed the basis for the innovation I chose to evaluate at the joint military base.

From their analysis, Cohen-Shotanus et al. (2009) identified three categories of development that were essential to my decision making about this form of mentoring. These categories were as follows: (1) learning experiences, (2) interactive learning and (3) conditions for well-functioning groups. Under these categories, the authors identified the types of learning the students revealed in their reflective portfolios. These learnings included personal learning, deeper thinking about oneself, empathy development, professional learning, interactive discussion, internal role models, and training opportunity.

In chapter one, I detailed some challenges entry-level student services workers were experiencing with the unit's professional development program and feeling less prepared to engage in other professional spaces. I also detailed how participants were challenged with connecting more meaningfully with their supervisors. I chose this approach due to the study's purpose of developing the professional capacity of student health sciences students and its encouragement of critical thinking about oneself. I identified the approach as an appropriate initial innovation to addressing the problem of practice at JBLM.

Today's community college student affairs units face challenges of complex work units, creating quality and timely professional development, and an increased focus on institutional excellence. The preceding was a discussion of how these competing challenges may impact student services staff members within community colleges. This discussion was followed by an argument for peer-to-peer mentoring as an appropriate response to value unique traits and skills of complex work units within community colleges. In the next section, previous iterations of research in context at Pierce College at JBLM is presented to recap the steps taken to determine the challenges facing the student services unit on the joint military base, lessons learned in context, and opportunities for peer-to-peer mentoring program as an innovation.

### **Previous Efforts Guiding the Research**

In this section, a synopsis of previous iterations of research is presented with lessons learned in context. Specifically, I discuss the exploratory cycle where I conducted interviews and collected survey data. The lessons learned in this cycle supported the preparation for the next iteration. Based upon lessons learned, I focused the next iteration

on employee development. Some key themes were identified during this cycle that would support development of the third cycle of research. In the third cycle of research, I conducted a pilot of the peer-to-peer mentoring program at Pierce College at JBLM. The lessons learned from this iteration supported development of the peer-to-peer mentoring program that was the focus of the fourth cycle of research. The peer-to-peer mentoring program was discussed later in this chapter.

### **Lessons Learned from Work Environment**

The purpose of this initial research was to explore the work environment and to determine the feelings and perceptions of staff members within our student services unit as they related to the current work environment. To accomplish this, I administered an exploratory survey focusing on work environment, staff satisfaction, and staff work needs. I also conducted one-to-one interviews with participants to gain a more complete understanding of their perceived challenges and professional growth needs. Participants indicated a strong commitment to the organization. However, they also indicated that they did not feel empowered to make decisions. Moreover, members of our student services team felt that they did not have the tools to become more effective in their current work or opportunities for growth toward their next career move. Participants felt that there were significant gaps in professional development.

Participants also expressed concern with alienation within the unit and alienation from their counterparts at Pierce College District. During one-to-one interviews, the participants used terms such as “siloes” and “redheaded stepchild” to describe their feelings and perceptions about their position within the larger district. Members of the

student services unit intimated that mentorship, professional development, and input on key issues is what they needed to feel more connected and confident in the workplace.

### **Lessons Learned about Employee Development**

During this iteration, I continued my investigation of our student services unit at Pierce College at JBLM. The focus of this iteration was employee development. During this iteration, I administered a survey focusing on staff development, staff recognition and appreciation, and staff-to-supervisor relations. There were three key outcomes from this study. In general, staff members were satisfied with the level of recognition and appreciation. However, they expressed concern in the area of supervisor feedback and initial/ongoing training. Specifically, participants expressed a desire to work alongside a knowledgeable colleague for a more extended period of time prior to being asked to fully engage with students on their own. Being asked to take on their new roles too soon left them feeling underprepared to fully engage with students and respond to their requests. Additionally, they expressed a desire for an individualized career path that prepared them for the next career move. They appreciated the homegrown manuals, but they felt that these can be limited. Participants stated that connections with supervisor and/or knowledgeable others may have helped them grasp the scope of their work more quickly. Further, their continued satisfaction within the environment would be most readily supported with an individualized career path that combined their professional development in context with their future aspirations.

Based upon interview and survey data, I concluded that staff members preferred more immediate supervisor responses as a necessary element to their career development. One interview respondent stated, “I just think that little things like that can make a big

difference.” Another interview respondent characterized working in education at a military site as a “thankless job” and further stressed that it is critical that supervisors understand this sentiment and demonstrate enough wherewithal to show appropriate appreciation for our team member’s service. The idea of a more defined training and professional development path was expressed by all interview participants. Mentoring and social learning were both suggested as ways to better connect with team members and mission and essential to career path development.

### **Lessons Learned from Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Pilot**

In spring 2017, I piloted a peer-to-peer mentoring and reflection program, and evaluated the program to determine how such a program may support reshaping the work environment such that it may become more responsive to employees’ needs for social connections and career progression. Specifically, unit feedback to this point aligns with an employee desire for the following: more meaningful connections within the workplace, a more well-defined employment path that incorporates employees’ future professional aspirations, and more consistent constructive feedback from supervisors. The mentoring program was conducted over a four-week period. I did not achieve the desired four to six participants in this study. With the three participants who accepted the invitation, I implemented guided peer-to-peer mentoring through group dialogue around key topics. We started with a focus on personal connections and expanded into key educational issues that may have contributed to the participants’ connections to higher education. The work outside of these sessions was primarily encompassed in individual reflections. Data was collected through recorded group interactions, researcher observations and field notes, and individual reflective journaling.

Through open coding, axial coding, and identification of emergent themes, I concluded that peer-to-peer mentoring may support addressing the perceived wickedity within the student services unit at Pierce College at JBLM. In doing so, we may establish a culture of empowerment and lay a foundation for a community of practice. An identified area of appreciation within the program was openness of interactions. Participants felt more inclined to share their knowledge and experiences. Another area of appreciation was the opportunity to develop more trust within our work units. This is a foundational element in developing a community of practice. Participants also developed a more meaningful appreciation for the goals and aspirations of their peers and their knowledge on key higher education issues as they related to our local context. Additionally, participants expressed an appreciation for the researcher positionality and felt that it was essential to their willingness to engage in discussions. As the researcher, my positionality was that of a researcher, learner, and mentor as I interacted with our group. We learned from each other and developed a level of respect for each other that we may not have reached otherwise.

I identified three key gaps within the program implementation and execution that I needed to address in my next research iteration. First, participants stated that they felt the program was too short and they needed more time to dive deeper into their career aspirations. Second, participants felt that they needed a greater opportunity to challenge and support each other in developing a career plan. Finally, participants were concerned that the number of participants was not adequate. They felt that there should have been at least four to six participants. These key gaps were addressed, as detailed in the next chapter.

## **Innovation**

Based on the prior research, I evaluated a fully-developed mentoring program in an action research study to determine its influences on the student services unit at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord. Guided peer-to-peer mentoring through group dialogue and individual reflection was used in an action research study to investigate how peer-to-peer interactions supported answering the three research questions around wicked problems, empowerment, and communities of practice. Also, participants were given an opportunity to develop appreciation for the work of their peers and their individual capabilities within the student services team. Additionally, participation in the program may have supported partnerships and encouraged participants to expand their thinking beyond their specific role, duties, and job-related tasks. Professional development in this study focused on social learning as a means for identifying and connecting to individual capabilities as well as promoting collaboration among colleagues. Peer-to-peer mentoring may have supported both personal and professional growth in current role or position and may have supported preparation for future career aspirations. Finally, the efficacy of the program was evaluated to determine its impact on fulfillment of two Pierce College District core themes, excellence of the one hand, with equity, diversity, and inclusion on the other. Further discussion of the innovation was provided in the next chapter.

## **Summary**

Community college student affairs leaders are under tremendous pressure to harness the talents of a complex workforce with differences in values, morals, work ethics, and interpretations of workplace relationships. In response, leaders may need to redesign professional development programs to improve timeliness and quality. This is in

response to a political environment that is placing an increasing emphasis on performance and excellence. This is a noteworthy transition from the focus on access that has pervaded community colleges for several decades. Professional development is a key component of institutional excellence. Cressey, Totterdill, and Exton (2013) stated that approaches to professional development have been evolving from paid external trainers to a focus on tacit knowledge and social dialogue. Mentoring may be one opportunity to embrace this evolution by facilitating a space for ongoing professional development, knowledge share, improvement in interpersonal skills, and building trust relationships. Through informal social dialogue and reflection, tacit knowledge may be exchanged and fill in areas not addressed in formal training programs. These exchanges have been most effective in peer-to-peer interactions. While quantitative methods may provide a breath, Cressey, Totterhill, and Exton noted that a complete understanding of social dialogue may be best investigated through a qualitative lens.

In framing my problem of practice, I used four theoretical perspectives: Rittel and Webber's (1973) theory wicked problems; Zimmerman's (1990) theory of psychological empowerment; Kanter's theory structural empowerment; and Wenger's (1998) social learning theory and communities of practice. Rittel and Webber's (1973) theory of wicked problems was chosen to depict the social challenges within the student services unit at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis – McChord (JBLM) related to power dynamics. Often our problems are posed by our leadership team and the solutions to these problems are developed by that same group. In previous iterations of research, student affairs staff have expressed a desire to be included in more of these conversations. Participants in the previous research activities have expressed that inclusion will support their development and long-term career growth. Other participants felt that while they are



not leaders, they may have some contributions based upon their workplace vantage point they may help us ask the right questions and address the right problems. In implementing peer-to-peer mentoring, I evaluated the program as one potential vehicle for creating a culture of collective problem posing with collaborative resolutions.

In addressing empowerment, I partnered elements of Zimmerman's (1990) psychological empowerment with Kanter's (1977) theory of structural empowerment to provide a more complete discussion of empowerment. According to Zimmerman, there are several internal and external factors that influence a person's ability to draw power from their chosen environment. Additionally, Kanter (1977) provided a fundamental strategy for creating a more empowering culture. According to the author, removing hierarchical barriers where appropriate may reduce inefficient communications, give power to the roles of entry-level workers, and improve managerial effectiveness. Sutton and Rao (2014) stated that quality professional development and encouraging growth through empowerment is key to retaining high quality staff members within colleges and universities.

Finally, Wenger's (1998) social theory of social learning and communities of practice, the author described people as social beings existing in potentially multiple communities. Wenger also provided four guiding principles of communities of practice. First, people are social beings. Second, knowledge grows through contextual competence. Third, knowing requires participation in a shared domain. Fourth, collective learning occurs through shared meaning making. Hodgkinson-Williams, Slay, and Sieborger (2007) further state that learning occurs through social interactions with the benefits of history, culture, and perceptions to encourage collective meaning making. Competence is

vital to participation in a community of practice. Competent membership is comprised of three components: mutuality of engagement; participation in a joint enterprise; and contributing to a shared repertoire.

Guided peer-to-peer mentoring through group dialogue and individual reflection was evaluated in this study to investigate how peer interactions may have addressed pervasive hierarchal alignments as a problem of practice. This approach was used to investigate the impact of guided peer interactions on creating an empowered work environment. Finally, guided peer-to-peer mentoring through dialogue and reflection was evaluated as a foundation for a community of practice at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

There may be multiple implications of this study with regard to higher education research. First, the research may add to higher education research in how mentoring supports professional growth. Second, the study may provide higher education leaders with an approach to building trust within teams, supporting employee growth through valuing the individual, and creating innovative spaces for knowledge share that may improve unit-level effectiveness. Finally, guided peer-to-peer mentoring through dialogue and reflection at Pierce College at JBLM may support fulfillment of two institutional outcomes. These two outcomes are *Excellence and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion* (Pierce College mission, n.d.). Further discussion of guided peer-to-peer mentoring and related research plan was discussed in chapter three.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate peer-to-peer mentoring as an approach to leverage the unique worldviews of a multifaceted work unit to improve workplace connections, improve interactions with military affiliated students, and support ongoing initiatives within the larger college. I described the problem of practice as an issue of work environment improvement. Specifically, from unit feedback, student services staff members desired the following: more meaningful connections within the workplace; a more well-defined employment path that incorporates employees' future professional aspirations; and more consistent constructive feedback from supervisors. I evaluated the peer-to-peer mentoring program as one approach to levelling hierarchy at Pierce College at JBLM to determine if it was an appropriate means for developing an empowered and interconnected unit. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Wicked problems – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program encourage a transition from an environment of predetermined problems and solutions by management to a collaborative culture of inquiry and problem resolution?
2. Engagement/empowerment – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program support the redistribution of power dynamics within student services?
3. Communities of practice – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, where and when does participation in a peer-mentoring program engender greater mutual support of colleagues and understanding of

team roles, and encourage sharing of workplace artifacts that might improve practice?

A peer-to-peer mentoring program at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) may have supported fulfillment of institutional core themes. Specifically, there were two Pierce College institutional core themes being investigated in this study: *excellence and equity, diversity, and inclusion*.

### **Setting**

I work in an unorthodox educational environment. I am the director of student success and outreach at a community college extended learning site located on a military joint base. I manage advising services and outreach efforts at two military education centers where the two installations are connected by a recently constructed bridge. We provide complete student services, online and face-to-face instruction, financial aid services, disability services, and veterans education benefits services. All of these services are packed into cubicle laden offices at both Fort Lewis, Washington, within the David L. Stone Education Center and at McChord Field in the McChord Field Consolidated Education Center. We serve more than 3,100 students worldwide. The student population is comprised of active-duty armed services members, military dependents, student veterans, military-affiliated family members, and the local community. The students are primarily adult learners, and many are substantially underprepared for college. Our staff at the military offices must be even more cognizant of the challenges these students face than our counterparts at our district campuses. Additionally, we operate within school, installation, federal, and state policies. These policies often conflict with each and contribute to some anxiety for students and staff. We

must execute our daily work with these policies in mind and use our practical wisdom to provide our students with optimal service.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were six members of our first line staff who have varying degrees of experience within higher education, within the military community, and at Pierce College. Two participants were from the registration staff who spend their work days processing enrollment requests and troubleshooting funding issues. Additionally, they offer general education-related student support through phone, email, and face-to-face communication. They also support advising and testing departments by answering general questions about each department's processes and procedures and preparing documents that are essential to the work in those areas. This document handling includes production and distribution of informational flyers and brochures and preparing graduation packets for processing. These participants had bachelor's degrees at the time they entered the program and study. They all were considering entering master's programs in education but were undecided. They were seeking mentoring as a way to gain access to areas of education they would not have had otherwise.

Four other participants were from the advising staff referred to as student success coaches in their daily work. These student success coaches provide full advising, coaching, and mentoring to all students at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis – McChord. They provide students with the initial steps to getting started. They support them in investigating their interests and in choosing the most appropriate program. On occasion, they may also provide these students with contact information for another school in the building or in the local area if a student's interests align with a program we do not offer. The student success coaches also interpret test scores and assist students in constructing a

balanced schedule that accounts for the student's circumstances inside and outside of class. They also complete official evaluations of transfer credit and provide timely referrals to services that will support student persistence and completion. Student success coaches also help students understand their responsibilities as they relate to the multitude of funding sources available to military-affiliated students, e.g. financial aid, military tuition assistance, the Military Spouse Advancement Account (MyCAA), veterans educational benefits, and worker retraining. Student success coaches are also active in the local community through participation in outreach events in and around the military community. These participants held master's degrees at the time they entered the program and study. They were considering entering programs that would give them greater knowledge in higher education but were undecided. They were also seeking mentoring as a way to expand their depth of knowledge in other areas of the student services unit. Finally, they were interested in fleshing out whether education was the right choice for them. If so, they were considering what role or position is the best fit. If not, they were considering what role or position would give them the most fulfillment. In Table 1, I have described each participant.

Table 1

*Participants*

<b>Participant (names presented are pseudonyms)</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>Kevin</b>	<b>Role:</b> Registration Specialist <b>Time with unit:</b> 1 year <b>Education:</b> Bachelor's degree <b>Aspirations:</b> unsure, considering options <b>Characteristics:</b> Asian-American, military family member
<b>Kayla</b>	<b>Role:</b> Registration Specialist <b>Time with unit:</b> 18 months <b>Education:</b> Bachelor's degree <b>Aspirations:</b> public service <b>Characteristics:</b> Asian-American
<b>Stacey</b>	<b>Role:</b> Student Success Coach <b>Time with unit:</b> 23 months <b>Education:</b> Master's degree <b>Aspirations:</b> higher education admin, real estate <b>Characteristics:</b> Caucasian-American
<b>Keith</b>	<b>Role:</b> Student Success Coach <b>Time with unit:</b> 19 months <b>Education:</b> Master's degree <b>Aspirations:</b> higher education-disability services, volunteerism <b>Characteristics:</b> Asian-American, military retiree
<b>Gloria</b>	<b>Role:</b> Student Success Coach <b>Time with unit:</b> 19 months <b>Education:</b> Master's degree <b>Aspirations:</b> higher education-outreach manager <b>Characteristics:</b> African-American, military veteran, military spouse, child of military member
<b>Carla</b>	<b>Role:</b> Student Success Coach <b>Time with unit:</b> 20 months <b>Education:</b> Master's degree <b>Aspirations:</b> higher education-curriculum development <b>Characteristics:</b> Asian-American, former military spouse, child of military member

Purposeful sampling was used in this research study. According to Creswell (2015), purposeful sampling is the appropriate sampling method for qualitative studies. In purposeful sampling, the researcher identifies a specific site(s) and/or participant(s) to investigate an identified phenomenon. There are several purposeful sampling types. The sampling approach used in this study was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is an approach where the researcher collects data from participants who are recommended by other knowledgeable members at the research site (Creswell, 2015). Snowball sampling was used in this study to identify the participants who would benefit from this study and program and provide information that would support answering the research questions. The sampling method used applied to the participants within the research site, Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Lewis Main office.

The primary drawback of this sampling method was that the sample size was restricted due to the small number of available participants within this research site ( $n=11$ ). Three of the 11 participants contributed to the pilot study. Therefore, I could not collect data on these participants. Two of the remaining eight prospective participants had circumstances that would impact their ability to engage fully. One such participant was retiring. This potential participant was participating in a weekly vacation plan to reduce their vacation time prior to separation. The other potential participant was experiencing healthcare challenges. Additionally, while sharing the same classification as the other viable participants, this potential participant was also a supervisor in the unit. With exception to the researcher, supervisors were intentionally excluded because the study and innovation were developed to investigate the impact of peer-to-peer mentoring on the entry-level non-supervisory staff members' meaning making in practice.



## **Innovation**

### **Guided Peer-To-Peer Mentoring with Group Dialogue and Individual Reflection**

A guided peer-to-peer mentoring program with group dialogue and individual reflection was evaluated to determine how peer interactions may support problem formulation and resolution, psychological and structural empowerment, and the development of a community of practice. Additionally, participants had an opportunity to develop more meaningful appreciation for the work of their peers and their career aspirations. Participation in the program may have supported partnerships and may have encouraged group members to expand their thinking beyond their specific role, duties, and job-related tasks. Professional development in this study focused on social learning that enhances knowledge, skills, abilities and opened pathways to future growth. In implementing the peer-to-peer mentoring program, I drew from the U.S. Office of Personnel's *Best Practices: Mentoring* (2008). Further discussion of the implementation and connection to research questions will be covered in the next section.

### **Implementing Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program**

**Recruitment and marketing strategy.** According to the U.S. Office of Personnel's *Best Practices: Mentoring* (2008), communication is essential to the success of a mentoring program. Further, a strong marketing strategy may reduce potential challenges with recruiting participants. In many cases, staff members may not fully appreciate the benefits of a mentoring program. Developing outreach materials and distributing these materials early may help energize potential participants and encourage volunteerism. With these best practices in mind, I initiated the recruitment process by developing and distributing a flyer via email that captured the essentials elements of the

peer-to peer mentoring program and highlighted its potential benefits. Additionally, I connected with my fellow and senior colleagues to identify a time when I may conduct an information session with the team to provide a snapshot of the program and answer any potential burning questions.

Following the marketing program and IRB approval, I connected with staff via email and invited volunteers to participate in the research study. One participant accepted the invitation. After this initial email invitation, I approached a knowledgeable other to identify participants who have expressed an interest in peer-to-peer mentoring or who may benefit from the essential tenets of the study. I approached these suggested team members personally and invited them to participate in the study. Five additional participants accepted my invitation to participate in the program and research study. One participant from the pilot innovation volunteered to be an alternate. I did not collect data on this alternate participant. Rather, we worked together week to week so that he/she would be prepared to take replace a participant if they withdrew from the study.

After a participant accepted the invitation, I provided a copy of the consent form (see Appendix A) and asked each participant to return their signed consent form to me directly. Once they provided their signed consent, I provided them with an orientation packet. The participants were also asked to complete Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, and Wilk's (2001) Conditions of Workplace Effectiveness Questionnaire – II (CWEQ-II), with wording modified to accommodate the change in environment from health to education. Appendix C contains the version of CWEQ-II used in this study. This survey was administered to gain a sense of the participants' initial feelings and perceptions of structural empowerment. I asked the participants to create an ID for confidentiality and maintain this ID for the posttest at the end of the program and study. The participants

were asked to complete the biographical form and to bring the remaining items in their packet to the orientation. The orientation packet included a welcome letter, program overview, biographical guide, mentoring agreement guide, a list of discussion topics, individual development plan, and a list of roles and responsibilities for the mentors and program coordinator. See Appendix B for peer-to-peer mentoring program materials.

**Orientation.** U.S. Office of Personnel's *Best Practices: Mentoring* (2008) suggests that an orientation may be a means for identifying pairs, establishing a mentoring agreement, and begin developing a mentoring action plan. I facilitated pair matching. However, I allowed the participants to choose whether or not to create a mentoring agreement. I established the parameters for meeting each week to discuss the IDP section for that week. I asked that they meet one to two hour per week via a medium of their choosing. The participants were also sent short introductory videos to help them engage prior to the orientation. Finally, I concluded the orientation with a tentative timeline for the program and research report. In the timeline, I identified the projected length of the program (total of eight weeks). I also engaged with the participants to gain consensus on an appropriate meeting time and place for each meeting.

The U.S. Office of Personnel's *Best Practices: Mentoring* (2008) offers a caution. There is the potential that the peer mentoring relationship does not develop into a mutually beneficial arrangement. In these instances, participants may opt out of the program and the study. In my discussion of packet materials, I discussed the opt out letter with participants and answered questions regarding termination of the relationship. There were no terminated mentoring relationships in program.

**Dialogue meetings.** The orientation was be the first of eight group dialogue meetings. As stated previously, I sent videos via email each week along with an

introduction to energize participants for the week's individual and group discussions. During the meetings, I facilitated of the recap of the week's individual conversations and we discussed any new discoveries gained through partner interactions and individual reflections. These meetings provided an opportunity for the peer mentors to share with the larger group as a community. They discussed challenges they may have faced and overcome together and discoveries they have made as a result of peer-to-peer interactions. These meeting were 45-60 minutes.

**Peer-to-peer interactions.** The peer interactions occurred between group dialogue meetings. The peer mentors met with each other to develop their individual development plans (IDP). In the individual development plan, they articulated and recorded their self-definition; identified their strengths, weaknesses, and talents; set goals; and formulated an action plan. Following interactions with each other, they completed an individual reflection and submitted it to the me prior to the next group meeting. In these reflections, I asked participants to detail the primary focus of their interactions; discuss what they learned from each other; and discuss the personal impact of the interactions. Further details of the reflections will be provided in the discussion of qualitative data sources.

**Shadow week.** "Shadow week" was implemented to encourage participants to visit their colleagues' workspaces and gain an insider's view of their colleagues' day-to-day functions. During this week, participants were to shadow their partners work for one to two hours over the course of the week. To prepare for a meaningful exchange with their partner, participants were asked to write two to three questions that they would like their peer partner to answer about their work to support learning that is specific. These questions were to lead to answers that they could not gain through other learning.

**Instruction guide for supervisors.** The U.S. Office of Personnel's *Best Practices: Mentoring* (2008) recommends developing an instruction guide for supervisors. Supervisor support throughout the program and beyond was essential to the success of the program. I provided a leaders guide (see Appendix D) to my fellow and senior colleagues to support their understanding of what their team members may potentially gain from the program and I provided them with a snapshot of the potential impact their participation may have on the unit. I also provided the guide to allow the supervisor an opportunity suggest some developmental goals that I may include in the suggested topics of discussion for participants or build into the IDP. I developed an instruction guide for my fellow and senior colleagues with the following: time commitments from peer mentors; benefits to the peer mentors; benefits to the supervisor; and the role of the supervisor during the program (U.S. Department of Personnel, 2008, p. 11).

**End-of-program survey, focus group interview, letters to the next cohort, and recognition.** At the end of the program, I administered the CWEQ-II a second time to gather data on how participants of perceptions of empowerment may have changed. I facilitated a 45-minute focus group to gather data on how participation in the peer-to-peer mentoring program may have supported answering the research questions. Following the focus group interview, I gave participants two options. They were invited to a 15-30-minute one-to-one interview or invited to write one final reflection based on the key point(s) of emphasis revealed during the focus group interview. The intent of this final interview/reflection activity was to allow participants to reflect on the overall impact the peer-to-peer mentoring program may have had on them personally and gather their perceptions of its impact on student success at Pierce College at JBLM. Finally, I invited

each participant to write a letter to the next cohort. I thanked all participants for their contributions and provided them with a timeline for data analysis, member checking, and report writing. I encouraged them to retain their individual development plans (IDP) and personally reflect on them. Additionally, I encouraged them to share their IDPs with their supervisors and initiate a dialogue around their learning during the study.

### **Research Plan**

This was an action research study of how peer-to-peer mentoring may support the improvement in workplace connections and interactions with military affiliated students. Additionally, I investigated how participation may support ongoing initiatives within the larger college. Action research is a systematic approach to educational research performed by practitioners who are seeking to improve their own practice. The research approach is cyclical in nature, and the proposed dissertation is the most recent of a sequence of iterations to appropriately address my problem of practice. Additionally, action research allows practitioners to bring theory to practice to better understand the environment, the actors, and the current challenges with eye toward improving quality and/or effectiveness (Mertler, 2014).

I used dialogue and reflection to guide conversations and support qualitative data collection to answer the three research questions. To provide further learning around the second research question, I used a survey instrument to measure the effectiveness of mentoring on developing more empowering work structures within our unit.

## Data Sources

### Qualitative Data Sources

The innovation in this study was intentionally interactive and relied heavily on the collective participation of the researcher and participants. Qualitative data sources used in this study included the following: weekly reflections following dyad interactions; researcher observational journaling; focus group interview following the innovation; one-to-one interviews and reflections conducted following focus group interview; and letters to next participants. These varied data sources were used to capture participants views as they developed throughout the study and to provide the researcher with insight into the evolution of the participants as the program progressed. These data sources were also used for data analysis and final report writing.

#### **Focus group interview with post-focus group reflections and interviews.**

According to Cressy (2015), this focus groups are most effective with four to six participants. The author states that focus groups provide opportunities to gather information from participants who may be hesitant to share their thoughts. However, comfort with each other is key to participant interactions. An end-of-program focus interview was used in this study to gather data from participants about the impact of peer-to-peer mentoring on their perceptions before, during, and after the program. See Appendix F for focus group interview protocol.

Following completion of the focus group interview, I transcribed the recording to identify the essential themes from the conversation. I then returned to the participants individually with the three key themes and I offered each participant an opportunity to complete one final reflection activity or one-to-one interview. In this reflection activity,

the participants were asked to choose one of the three topics and answer three questions about that topic in the form of a reflection. While the focus group interview was used to support participants' sharing as a group, the individual reflection activity and one-to-one interviews were used to give participants an opportunity to share their final thoughts without influence from others. See Appendix G for post-focus group interview/reflection activity. Their responses from the focus group interview, post-focus group interviews, and post-focus group reflection activity were used with other qualitative data sources to articulate and develop understandings and interpretations that contributed to answering the three research questions.

**Written participant reflections and letters to the next cohort.** At the end of each session, participants were asked to reflect on what they learned from and about each other. I also asked them to discuss personal impact of their interactions. I asked all participants to submit reflective journals were written by each participant based upon specified criteria that include the following four key components: the personal learning process based upon the topics discussed during the peer-to-peer meeting; what the participants specifically learned about themselves and their partner; personal discoveries as they relate to collaborating in peer-to-peer interactions and with a coach or guide; and a description of how the activities supported trust in their abilities and courage in brave spaces. The written reflections provided participants an opportunity to revisit and reinforce their learning, while energizing their engagement for the next session of activities.

Participants were also asked to write a letter to the next cohort. This activity was added during the study and program. The participants were asked to share the following with next participants: their overall thoughts on the program; what participants might



expect; and what benefit, if any the next cohort might hope to gain from their involvement. This exercise was added due to my concern over socially acceptable response bias. To address this concern, I added this activity to give the participants one final opportunity to provide feedback about the peer-to-peer mentoring program from their unique perspective. These reflections were used with other qualitative data sources to articulate and develop understandings and interpretations that contributed to answering the three research questions.

**Researcher observational journal.** Observations were recorded following each group session. I also recorded journal entries at different points in the program when I was concerned about participants' interactions with me and their perceptions of the program's intent. Rossman and Rallis (2017) define observations as a systematic record of events, activities, behaviors, and connections. The authors note that observations provide the researcher with an opportunity to complete the following: develop a greater understanding of the context; provide rich descriptions of the environment and events; capture implicit patterns not articulated otherwise; record interactions that participants may not be aware of or want to acknowledge; to record personal experiences and reflections; and to move beyond researcher/participant perceptions and capture reality as it exists in the researched context. Rossman and Rallis (2017) caution while observations may provide an opportunity to capture reality in context and identify emerging patterns, reality may be interpreted from multiple perspectives. These may include the researchers, the participants, and the reader, just to name a few. These journal entries were used with other qualitative data sources to articulate and develop understandings and interpretations that contributed to answering the three research questions.

## **Empowerment Survey**

The empowerment survey data was collected from pre- and post-innovation Likert scale surveys. The pre- and post-innovation survey was completed by all participants, using an identical instrument. Participants were asked to complete the initial survey prior to the introductory group session. In May 2018, participants were given an opportunity to complete the same survey after participation in the peer-to-peer mentoring program.

The survey is an adaptation of Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, and Wilk's (2001) Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire-II (CWEQ-II). The survey consists of six primary constructs followed by the global measure of empowerment (GE) at the end of the survey. The constructs are (1) opportunity, (2) resources, (3) information, (4) support (5) job activities scale (formal power), and (6) organization relationships scale (informal power). Constructs one through five consist of three items each on a Likert scale of 1=none through 5=a lot. Construct six consists of four items on a Likert scale of 1=none through 5=a lot. The global empowerment scale consists of two items on a Likert scale of 1=strongly disagree through 5=strongly agree. The post innovation survey was identical to the initial survey. Appendix C contains the version of CWEQ-II used in this study.

## **Analysis**

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

**In Vivo coding.** In Vivo coding was used as the initial coding approach. According to Saldana (2015), In Vivo coding involves using words or phrases directly from the data to summarize and describe what is happening in a given passage. It involves using the actual words of the participants to describe the participant perception. I

chose In Vivo coding due to its connection to action research. In action research, the emic view of participants allows researchers to capture the inherent meanings people derive from their experiences (Saldana, 2015).

**Provisional coding.** Following In Vivo coding, I chose provisional codes to arrange the data under the identified emergent categories. According to Saldana (2015), provisional coding is a beginning list of codes created by the researcher based upon the previous investigation of the phenomena being studied. I developed a provisional list using the key concepts from the theoretical perspectives guiding the study. These theoretical perspectives included the following: wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973), theory of structural empowerment (Kanter, 1977); theory of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 1990); and social learning theory and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). While this approach may support answering the research questions, Rossman and Rallis (2017) caution researchers against driving the data toward the etic view. Rather, they suggest that the researcher balance researcher-generating categories and codes with the indigenous categories and codes of participants. To address this caution from the authors, I chose eclectic coding with analytic memo writing and other coding methods to unpack the researcher and participant perspectives.

**Eclectic coding.** According to Saldana (2015), eclectic coding is a hybrid coding approach that employs two or more first or second cycle coding approaches and employs the strategic use of analytic memo writing to reduce the codes into a more coherent scheme. To answer the three research questions, I identified versus coding, values coding, and axial coding as my second cycle coding methods. Following versus and values coding, I developed an analytic memo to accompany each coding method. From this memo, I identified the key categories, themes, and initial assertions.

*Analytic memo writing.* I chose to develop an analytic memo following In Vivo and provisional coding to document what I was seeing in the data and to identify which coding methods would be most appropriate to articulate the emergent themes and categories. According to Saldana (2015), analytic memo writing provides researchers with an opportunity to unload their thoughts about what they are seeing in the data, provide insight about how the coding process and data analysis are unfolding, and identify next steps in analyzing the data. In this study, analytic memo writing consisted of identifying emergent themes and categories from first cycle coding to clarify appropriateness of decisions and to develop a richer understanding of the data. From this analytic memo writing I determined that eclectic coding with ongoing analytic memo writing would be most appropriate to further develop emergent themes and categories.

*Axial coding.* Axial coding was used to answer the third research question around communities of practice. In axial coding, patterns among the three qualitative data sources were identified and arranged into more expanded categories. According to Saldana (2015), axial coding represents logical continuation of initial coding. The objective of axial coding is to reconnect data where links may have been broken during initial coding. The intent is to determine the primary codes that should be articulated while potentially discarding the codes that are less frequent or essential to the study's objectives (Saldana, 2015). In axial coding, the axis is a category. Within a category, may be attributes and characteristics that identify "contexts, conditions, interactions, and consequences of a process (Saldana, 2015, p. 244)."

*Versus coding.* Versus coding was used to address the second research question around empowerment. According to Saldana (2015), versus codes are used to identify evidence of conflict within the data. The divergent relationships may include individuals,

groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, processes, and concepts. I identified this an appropriate coding approach due to the multiple instances of conflict that were revealed during first cycle coding and analytic memo writing. This coding approach was followed by code mapping where developed categories, themes, and assertions related to empowerment.

**Values coding.** Values coding was used to address the first research question around wicked problems. According to Saldana (2015), values codes are used to reflect participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs. This coding method provides the researcher with an opportunity to further explore the unique perspectives and worldviews of participants. Values represent the importance participants place upon themselves, others, things, and ideas. Attitudes refer to how people think about themselves, others, things, and ideas. Beliefs represent the systems, the personal knowledge, morals, biases, and other social factors that are foundational to people's thinking about themselves, others, things, and ideas.

To learn more about the problem of practice as a wicked problem, I identified a need to get at the values of this group. Initially, I framed the first research question around wicked problems as a work environment problem. However, I found that values coding was essential to developing a more complete understanding of the participants' views regarding the workplace.

### **Credibility and Rigor of Qualitative Data Analysis**

**Triangulation.** I used multiple data sources: to capture the various points in time; to provide a highly descriptive depiction of the context; actors (including researcher); and

the activities within. This approach supported me in recording and accurately reporting the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

**Prolonged engagement.** I was immersed in the setting with the participants for the duration of the study. Spending considerable time in the setting and with the participants further supported the rich detail needed to fully communicate how the research project unfolds through a systematic process. Prolonged engagement supported explanation of how the data collection methods were used in answering the research questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

**Member checking.** I provided a copy of draft findings to the participants for review prior to completion of the dissertation and requested that they provide feedback to Sherman Dorn, identified as an Arizona State University faculty member, to isolate their feedback from my position as a supervisor. Doing so provided the participants an opportunity to hear how the research process was unfolding, gain insight into my analysis, and provide feedback about incomplete accounts and emerging patterns. Participants were also given an opportunity to argue for inclusion of patterns that were not articulated by the researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This process was used to support my interpretations of data sources.

### **Quantitative Instrument**

The pre- and post-test (modified CWEQ-II) was used to determine the initial perceptions of structural empowerment prior to the study and to assess potential changes after the peer-to-peer mentoring innovation. The number of participants was too small to justify inferential statistical analysis; the focus here was on description, using the pre- and post-measures in conjunction with the qualitative measures to develop a clearer

understanding of peer-to-peer mentoring in context and to support answering the three research questions guiding the study. Table 2 shows the timeline of the study.

Table 2

*Timeline of the Study*

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Procedures</b>
Select participants; researcher begins journaling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invited student services staff to participate in intervention</li> </ul>
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussed purpose, objectives, and roles of participants and researcher</li> <li>• Researcher administered CWEQ-II</li> <li>• Completed peer-to-peer pair matching</li> <li>• Researcher started observations and field notes</li> </ul>
Meetings 2-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher defined environment and established continuous and timely communication</li> <li>• Researcher presented videos and lead group discussions to support peer-to-peer interactions</li> <li>• Participants met between group sessions to develop IDPs and shadow partners' work</li> </ul>
Meeting 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants reflected upon their time together during shadow week</li> <li>• Participants discuss IDPs and action plans and identified personal/professional next steps</li> <li>• Researcher conducted focus group interview</li> <li>• Researcher followed up with after focus group one-to-one interviews and reflection activity</li> <li>• Researcher administered CWEQ-II posttest.</li> <li>• Researcher discussed next steps in the research process, i.e. data analysis, member checking, dissertation, and future iterations of the study</li> </ul>
Data Analysis and Final Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher conducted data analysis, member checking and completed dissertation to include implications, limitations, and discussed next cycle of research</li> </ul>



## **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. First, only participants from Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis – McChord were invited to participate in the innovation for this research study. I decided to use only participants in this unit to ensure that themes are developed that are meaningful to this group and appropriate for the aims this study. However, different themes may have been generated if the two main campuses were included as research sites. Nonetheless, the intent was to develop an understanding of peer-to-peer mentoring and the role of personal reflection to address the problem of practice at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM). Second, the participants were primarily female, which is representative of the personnel breakdown at Pierce College at JBLM. I acknowledged that a more diverse sample with respect to gender may have yielded increased variations in the items and a later saturation point. Third, my position as a manager may have been impactful to participant meaning making during this study and innovation. With that understanding, I communicated explicitly throughout the study and innovation that my position in this study is that of a participant researcher, learner, and guide.

Finally, the findings of this study were transferable rather than generalizable. According to Gelo, Braakmann, and Benetka (2008), generalizability refers to the sampling of a representative population. Deductively, the researcher may conclude the findings from the randomly sampled group can be generalized to the larger group. This deductive inference occurs most often in quantitative studies where breadth is more paramount to depth. According to Gelo et al. (2008), transferability is most often associated with more qualitative studies where depth rather than breadth is more essential to study some identified phenomena. Transferability refers to how the systematic

approach of the study may be applied to other similar contexts. In such studies, inductive inference is the systematic process of drawing consistent and meaningful themes, conceptual frameworks, and potential theories from observations of a phenomena. With regard to generalizability and transferability, I focused on the latter in this study. I sought transferability of the research design to other contexts that may be challenged with similar practice level questions.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, I will discuss the data analysis from the research study where I evaluated the efficacy of peer-to-peer mentoring as an approach to addressing the research questions identified in chapter three. In the sections that follow, I have described the data analysis procedures to include a) initial analysis activities, b) coding approaches, c) tables and figures to support choices made, and d) a discussion of assertions. In chapter three, I identified the problem of practice under investigation at Pierce College at JBLM as an issue of work environment. Specifically, I have identified in my previous cycles of research an employee desire for the following: more meaningful connections within the workplace; a more well-defined employment path that incorporates employees' future professional aspirations; and more consistent constructive feedback from supervisors. These research questions were as follows:

1. Wicked problems – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program encourage a transition from an environment of predetermined problems and solutions by management to a collaborative culture of inquiry and problem resolution?
2. Engagement/empowerment – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program support the redistribution of power dynamics within student services?
3. Communities of practice – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, where and when does participation in a peer-mentoring program engender greater mutual support of colleagues and understanding of

team roles, and encourage sharing of workplace artifacts that might improve practice?

As the director of student success and outreach at Pierce College at JBLM, a community college extended learning site, I know that it is imperative that our faculty, staff, and administrators understand the challenges these students face. We must understand those challenges so that we may develop our classrooms and services with the agility to meet our students where they are. I am the administrator for our advising and outreach services to our military-affiliated students and the general public. To support our multi-modal instruction, we provide complete student services and other auxiliary services such as financial aid. We serve more than 3,100 students worldwide. These students are primarily adult learners, and many are underprepared for college. We must understand their challenges and also the multiple levels of policy so that we can apply practical wisdom in context to comply with these policies while serving the unique needs of this population.

As stated in chapter one, the desired impact of the study and its innovation was to lay the groundwork for an organization that learns to evaluate itself critically. An example of this may start with reframing our deficiencies as opportunities for growth within our practice. With participation in peer-to-peer mentoring, the desire was for staff members to visualize their connection to our institutional outcomes, appreciate their value in the strategic plans, and feel more accountable in their roles. Subsequently, leaders may be able to have higher quality dialogue with their team members. This improved dialogue may include discussions of improved development plans that incorporate institutional objectives with career aspirations.

## Quantitative Data Results

The pre- and post-test (modified CWEQ-II) was used to determine the initial perceptions of structural empowerment prior to the study and to assess potential changes after the peer-to-peer mentoring innovation. The number of participants ( $n=6$ ) was too small to justify statistical analysis; the focus here was on description, using the pre- and post-measures in conjunction with the qualitative measures to develop a clearer understanding of peer-to-peer mentoring in context and to support answering the three research questions guiding the study.

The survey was an adaptation of Laschinger, Finegan, Shamian, and Wilk's (2001) Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire-II (CWEQ-II). The pre- and post-test results below represent the six primary constructs followed by the global measure of empowerment (GE) at the end of the survey. The constructs were (1) opportunity, (2) resources, (3) information, (4) support (5) job activities scale (formal power), and (6) organization relationships scale (informal power). Constructs one through five consisted of three items each on a Likert scale. Construct six consisted of four Likert items. The global empowerment scale consisted of two Likert items. The post innovation survey was identical to the initial survey.

The survey was administered to all six participants following initial one-on-one overview and after I had gathered all signed consent forms. The participants returned their responses to me (researcher) prior to orientation. Participants were provided the CWEQ with Likert scale options. There were no "yes" or "no" response items, multiple selection items, and open response items. Likert scale items that asked about the level of agreement with the statement provided featured closed-ended options: 1 = none, 3 = some, and 5 = a lot. For global empowerment, Likert items that asked about the level of

agreement with each statement provided featured closed-ended options: 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The starting and ending means for the response frequencies of this survey are described below in Table 3.

Table 3

*CWEQ-II Pre- and Posttest Response Frequencies*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Starting mean</b>	<b>Ending mean</b>
Opportunity	3.8	3.9
Information	3.9	3.9
Support	4.1	3.9
Resources	3.4	3.8
Job activities scale	3.5	3.8
Organizational relationships	3.3	3.8
Global empowerment	4.5	3.9

These survey results were not generalizable due to the small sample ( $n=6$ ). This survey was administered to determine the areas of structural empowerment where peer-to-peer mentoring was most impactful. I also administered the survey to determine the areas that may require additional investigation to determine the most effective innovation for those identified areas. From the opportunity, information, and support constructs, I identified no substantive change in the starting and beginning means. From the resources, job activities scale, and organizational relationships, I identified a slight change in participants perceptions. I identified these constructs as the areas where peer-to-peer mentoring might be most impactful. However, I identified from the global empowerment construct that participants' perceptions of empowerment in the workplace overall decreased after participating in the innovation. I used the analysis of qualitative data sources to determine why the participants' perceptions of global empowerment may have changed.

## **Qualitative Data Analysis**

I developed the innovation in this study to be intentionally interactive and immersive to capture the participants' perceptions within the student services unit at a community college on a joint military base. To deliver the innovation, I relied heavily on the collective participation of the researcher and participants. The program materials I chose for this study also served as qualitative data sources. These program materials and qualitative sources included the following: weekly reflections following dyad interactions; researcher observational journaling; focus group interview following the innovation; one-to-one interviews and reflections conducted following focus group interview; and letters to the next cohort. These varied program materials were used as data sources to capture participants' views as they developed throughout the study and to provide me (researcher) with insight into the evolution of the participants as the program progressed. As data sources, these materials were used for data analysis and final report writing. In the sections that follow, I described the data analysis activities to include analysis decisions made as my learning about the participants and context increased. I also concluded with a discussion of my findings and validation of those findings through member checking.

### **Data Familiarization and Organization**

I began my data analysis with immersion through multiple cycles of reading and listening, given that the data sources included a broad range of prompts, settings, and modes of delivery. To start, I read through all individual reflections. I then listened to the focus group interview. I had previously transcribed this interview to identify key themes to pursue in post focus-group reflections. Of the six participants, four participants chose

to submit written reflections, and two participants chose to give their responses through individual interviews. I read through the individual focus group reflections and listened to both focus group reflection interviews. While listening, I transcribed both interviews. In addition to the interviews, I prompted participants to submit “letters to the next cohort” as a framework for them to communicate with an imagined set of peers, and four of the six participants wrote such a letter. I read all such letters to the next cohort.

To complete this initial reading, I read through my eight weeks of observational journaling. I chose to read the participant responses first to gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for their emic view. Following the cycles of reading, I organized all data into word documents and prepared each document for coding. Some participants chose to provide their written reflections by typing them and then printing a copy. They provided this copy to me in my office inbox. Other participants emailed their reflections to me via my ASU student email. Those that were printed copies, I transcribed them verbatim and included them in the reflections document for analysis.

### **First Cycle Coding**

**Developing categories and provisional codes.** I used an exploratory coding method to develop some initial categories and codes based upon the research guiding the study. According to Saldana (2015), exploratory coding methods are initial coding assignments created in lieu of a more refined approach. Prior to initial coding, I created five categories and 21 provisional codes. Four categories were from the theoretical perspectives guiding the study. The fifth category was a category named “lessons learned” to identify in the study impactful practices and opportunities for refinement. Rossman and Rallis (2017) refer to this opening categorical list as analyst-constructed



categories. Each of the four theoretical perspectives had specific characteristics. Drawing from those essential characteristics, I identified the provisional codes.

**In Vivo and provisional coding.** I coded all weekly participant reflections, weekly researcher observational journals, focus group interview responses, after-focus group reflections and interviews, and letters to the next cohort with In Vivo coding. I did so to appreciate the emic view of the participants and to give illumination to the hidden meanings in the passages. Below, in Figure 2, is a sample of the line by line initial coding. The initial code is in the left column, while the passage being coded is in the right column.

Identifying comfort and ease with partner	<p>Our discussion felt very comfortable and easy. We had a lot of similarities with our answers through the questions. We started sharing experiences that supported our answers and it made me feel a lot comfortable with my mentor. I also felt like I am not alone in the professional world. Most of our discussion were about how building relationships within our professional life has become the key factor for success in the work place.</p> <p>I shared that I've had a job where it felt toxic and exhausting to be. It made me feel like I'm dragging myself to work and that any minute I wanted to quit my job. Then my mentor shares an almost similar experience. It's amazing how other people experience it too and I realized that sometimes looking for a profession can be a trial-and-error method. And with all the topics we tackled, we were</p>
Stating that they and their partner share multiple similarities	
Sharing experiences supported developing comfort with partner	
Feeling alone in professional world	
Discussed importance of relationship building with partner	
Sharing impact of previous "toxic" and "exhausting" work environment	
Stating that mentor had a similar experience	
Looking for a profession can be a "trial-and-error" process	
Various topics enable participant and partner to share related experiences	

Figure 2. Sample of in vivo coding

I then coded the codes using the provisional coding list. Below is a snippet from the document featuring the initial codes as phrases with provisional codes added in parentheses. Figure 3 displays a sample of provisional coding following In Vivo coding.

<b>(community)</b> Encourage you to get to colleague in different way	encourage you get to know them in a different way. The questions you will use to guide your weekly discussions are probably not ones you have asked before...and may not be ones you
---	--



<b>(self-efficacy)</b> Questions are not ones you have asked before	have necessarily given much thought to with regard to your own answers. I found that I was really having to look deep within for responses, and in the process, discovered things about myself that were really eye-opening. While it definitely reinforced some traits that I consider strengths and what has gotten me through some really tough times, it also shined light on behaviors and/or lifestyle choices I would like to change. I am truly grateful for these insights; I don't know that I would have had the opportunity to identify these otherwise.
<b>(self-efficacy)</b> Had to look deep within for responses	
<b>(self-efficacy)</b> Discovered things that were really eye-opening	
<b>(self-efficacy)</b> Reinforced traits I consider strengths	
<b>(self-efficacy)</b> Shine light on things I'd like to change	

Figure 3. Sample of provisional coding

After coding the codes, I quantified the codes by identifying the frequency for each code was identified in the data. I did so to identify the most salient codes that could be used to reveal emergent themes, categories and assertions. In Table 3 below, I have provided the final results of cycle 1 coding following application of the provisional codes. My next step in the coding process was analytic memo writing. During reading and rereading the data, I identified some emergent themes. These themes became clearer

as I coded the data using In Vivo coding and then coded those codes using the provisional coding list.

Table 4

*Provisional Codes and Frequencies*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Provisional Code</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Structural Empowerment	Access to information and resources	11
	Varying Opportunities to Learn and Develop	8
	Team Support	5
	Managerial Support	4
Psychological Empowerment	Self-efficacy	487
	Skill Development	38
	External Influences	29
	Cultural Awareness	31
	Motivation to Control	21
	Internal Influences	16
	Locus of Control	11
	Collective Action	1
Wicked Problems	Symptom of Deeper Problem	54
	Unique Characteristics	27
	Change in mindset	6
	No Clear Solution	2
	No Clear Problem Definition	1
	Outcomes True/False	0
	Multiple Parties Involved in Resolution	0
Communities of Practice	Community	306
	Practice	175
	Domain	23
Lessons Learned	Program Coordination	244
	Program Materials	23
	Research Plan	5
	Data Sources	2
	Total Codes	1530

Qualitative data sources included weekly participant reflections, weekly researcher observational journals, focus group interview, after-focus group reflections and interviews, and letters to next participants.

## **Second Cycle Coding**

**Eclectic coding.** According to Saldana (2015), eclectic coding is a hybrid coding approach that employs two or more first or second cycle coding approaches and employs the strategic use of analytic memo writing to consolidate the codes into a more coherent scheme. Eclectic coding is one of two coding approaches that is appropriate following provisional coding. I chose eclectic coding to gain a greater understanding of the emergent themes and categories from first cycle coding. Through analytic memo writing, I identified versus coding, values coding, and axial coding as my second cycle coding methods. Following versus and values coding, I developed an analytic memo to accompany each coding method. From this memo, identified the key categories, themes, and assertions.

**After first cycle analytic memo writing.** Following initial coding, I used analytic memo writing to identify the key themes, categories and assertions to pursue in the second cycle of coding. I noted values coding as essential to capturing the values, beliefs, and attitudes that I was identifying in the data. I identified these values across the multiple qualitative data sources and I identified how these values were essential to the meaning-making for participants during the program. As I progressed through the study and innovation, I began to recognize the limitations of my initial interpretation of the problem of practice as a wicked problem. Through analytic memo writing, I identified capturing these values as significant to identifying my next step in investigating my new understanding of the wicked problem.

I noted that my approach to empowerment may have had several factors that reduced participants' willingness to participate in some activities that I perceived to be empowering. Through analytic memo writing, I identified how I perceived the program

design to be empowering while participants' views were more aligned with early confusion, paralysis, and an appearance of waiting for permission. The memo writing was essential to my analysis because it allowed me to make connections to the theoretical perspectives and challenge my assumptions as they related to empowerment.

Through analytic memo writing, I identified the community of practice elements requiring further coding in the second cycle. I also identified what may have been the logical domain of the communities of practice by reflecting on the first cycle codes and writing about the emergent themes. I also identified the focus group interview and after-focus-group interviews and reflections as the sources that provided the most essential data for second cycle coding around community and practice. Through first cycle coding and analytic memo writing, I identified the multiple instances of community and practice. Across the multiple data sources, I arrived at the logical domain. Analytic memo writing supported my refined thinking and identifying axial coding as the appropriate second cycle coding approach. Below is a sample of the analytic memo I wrote following provisional coding, to address empowerment:

Sample from analytic memo on empowerment:

Building community essential to structural empowerment. An assumption for me as the researcher is that I provided the participants with the information needed to effectively engage in the program. However, access to information and resources were not chief concerns for this group. Access to each other as people proved to be more salient. Access to information became important during Shadow week and after completion of the IDP. Personal connections are as essential to structural empowerment as access to other resources and information. Seasoned professionals wanting to be liked more than seeking growth or development was evident throughout. Spoke favorably of managerial support at JBLM. Provided example of a team member from another unit who was not being supported adequately.

**Values coding and wicked problems.** I identified values coding as an appropriate second cycle coding method to support answering the first research question

(wicked problems) and to capture the participants' stated values for further analysis and interpretation. I identified values coding through analytic memo writing following first cycle coding. I identified values coding as essential from the multiple values references in the qualitative sources. I identified participants' views of the workplace and their role within it to be grounded in how they viewed themselves in other spaces such as family, church groups, friendships, and culture.

To complete values coding, I placed the raw data, such as interview transcript portions, into a three-column table. The first column consisted of the raw data. The second column consisted of the working values codes. The third column consisted of the codes broken into values, beliefs, and attitudes. I used the color green to identify the passages used for values coding. Below in Figure 4 is a sample of coded data.

<p>My strengths... to a fault... basically encompass ideals of empathy and harmony.</p> <p>Finding consensus or common ground or a way that works best for everyone seems to be one of my greatest attributes. To do this, I'd say I use listening and empathy as I am usually able to picture things from a poverty outside of my own... and figure out ways to make things work.</p>	<p>Empathy Harmony</p> <p>Finding consensus and common ground</p>	<p><b>V:</b> Empathy <b>V:</b> Harmony <b>B:</b> Finding consensus and common ground</p>
<p>I like to make the best peace and find that I can usually tie "unrelated" things together to create something stronger. I know these are my strengths because I'm usually in the middle of circles... seeing and relating to things from all sides... (even to my own detriment)...</p>	<p>Like to make best peace and tie unrelated things together</p>	<p><b>A:</b> Like to make best peace and tie unrelated things together</p>

Figure 4. Sample of values coded data

I identified 12 essential values and I further identified three subcategories under beliefs and five subcategories under attitudes. Below, in Table 5, I have collected the essential values, beliefs, and attitudes of the participants in the research study and peer-to-peer mentoring program.



Table 5

*Student Services Workplace Values, Beliefs, and Attitudes*

<b>Essential Values</b>	<b>Beliefs</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>
1. Honesty and authenticity	<i>Learning and development</i>	<i>Dislikes</i>
2. Trust	1. Imparting knowledge is very rewarding	1. Hates toxic and exhausting work environments
3. Family and culture	2. Learning from others is rewarding	2. Wants to care for loved ones without struggle
4. Personal/Professional Development	3. Learning is vital to growth within the team	3. Current financial circumstance is not allowing follow-through on dreams/goals
5. Empathy	4. Furthering my education vital to my advancement	4. Feeling professional positioning is menial by comparison to others
6. Helping people	<i>Strong relationships and commitment to service</i>	<i>Enjoyments</i>
7. Financial Security	1. Building professional relationships is key to success	1. Enjoys feeling inspired
8. Non-judgmental setting	2. Commitment to helping people and having positive impact is who I am	2. Enjoys fun, deep, and real conversation
9. Happiness and harmony	<i>Familial and cultural impact</i>	3. Enjoys authentic workplace
10. Others' insights and views	1. Self-definition derived from culture and family	4. Enjoys positive work experience
11. Resilience	2. Military culture backbone of identity	5. Enjoys learning from others
12. Work Ethic	3. Thrive in multicultural interactions	6. Enjoys work activities that make people smile
		7. Enjoys interesting learning experiences
		8. Enjoys bringing people together regardless of role or position

**Analytic memo following values coding.** Following values coding, I wrote an analytic memo to develop categories and themes from the table presented above for additional discussion later in this chapter. First, I discussed values and how the values presented in participant materials aligned with my observations. Below is a sample analytic memo about participant values:

The participants expressed some strong values such as honesty, trust, authenticity, and a non-judgmental work setting. With regard to honesty, one participant stated, “For me, that is something that means the most. Without honesty, what else do we have? That being said, I think for both of us, especially for me, honesty and “realness” is how I relate to people.” Another participant expressed his/her feelings and perspective on the importance of judgement-free interactions. The participant stated, “I want them to feel that there is no judgement happening, just true care and concern.” Another quote from the participants reflected how being in a judgment-free setting helped him/her think more deliberately about their current career and future professional choices. The participant stated, “I reflected about the past few months, and how freeing it was for me to express my innermost thoughts. The program made me start thinking with intention about my professional goal and face the reality of why I haven’t pursued it.”

Second, I discussed how these values aligned with the identified beliefs and attitudes and I also discussed where participant views may have departed from these stated values. Below is a sample analytic memo about beliefs and attitudes:

In general, the beliefs and attitudes of this group aligned with their values. However, I identified some key threads across the values, beliefs, and attitudes of this group. The first key thread was the need for harmony and “keeping the peace.” The need to keep the peace and avoid confrontation and struggle was strong with this group. These factors may present a challenge to redistributing power dynamics and developing a more collaborative approach to problem definition and resolution. One participant stated, “My strengths... to a fault... basically encompass ideals of empathy and harmony. Finding consensus or common ground or a way that works best for everyone seems to be one of my greatest attributes.”

I also discussed the emergent themes and categories and next steps in the research process. Specifically, I connected the values coding to wicked problems and prepared for a discussion of empowerment in later passages.

**Versus coding and empowerment.** Through analytic memo writing, I identified several binary relationships in the data. These repeated instances of conflict in the data may have impacted participants level of perceived empowerment during the program. To capture these potential conflicts and further explain emergent themes, I identified versus coding as the most appropriate second cycle coding approach. Versus coding provided the vehicle to identify the versus relationships from the data for further interpretation. The interpretation of the identified versus codes were used to answer the second research question (empowerment). The learning I gained from understanding these conflict relationships was essential to deciphering what does and does not empower participants in the context under investigation, a community college at a joint military base.

The iterative process described above was essential to the findings presented below, I identified versus coding in my initial memo writing following first cycle coding. I identified this coding approach as appropriate due to the multiple versus relationships I identified as impactful to structural and psychological empowerment. I developed a list initial versus codes followed by three additional iterations of versus coding leading to concept development. These concepts were then developed into categories, themes, and assertions related to conflict relationships. In Figure 5 below, I provided a sample of the first iteration versus codes.

## First Iteration of Versus Coding

### **IDP questions vs how I see myself**

Having conversations with my peer mentor with these questions, challenged me a bit as I don't really think about these types of questions in my daily life. Plus I am not one that really tries to talk about myself,

### **Daily work requirements vs focus on program**

This week (and pretty much this month) has been difficult to meet up and get our conversations in as we have been swamped with students.

### **Younger vs older**

Although we do have an age gap,

### **Talking about strengths vs comfort**

we both realized that we both had the notion that to talk about our strengths is a bit uncomfortable.

### **Keeping the peace vs offending others**

We also discussed how that strength sometimes turns around and backfires because we don't want to offend others in the process

### **Being genuine vs repercussions**

It's great to be able to reveal so much to a co-worker and friend without feeling anxious about repercussions.

*Figure 5.* Sample of first iteration versus codes

After the first iteration of versus coding, I continued to a second, third, and fourth iteration of coding with code mapping. I chose code mapping to develop categories and themes. In the second iteration of coding, I developed some preliminary categories and organized the first iteration versus codes into these categories. These categories were stakeholders, perceptions/actions, and issues. Below in Figure 6, I provided a sample of this second iteration of versus coding.

## Second iteration of versus coding

### Perceptions/actions

#### Social/Cultural identifications vs Self-definitions

Having conversations with my peer mentor with these questions, challenged me a bit as I don't really think about these types of questions in my daily life. Plus I am not one that really tries to talk about myself,

#### Social/Cultural identifications vs Self-definitions

we both realized that we both had the notion that to talk about our strengths is a bit uncomfortable.

#### Social/Cultural identifications vs Self-definitions

This strength is inherent and we don't really notice it's there because this is just who we are.

#### Social/Cultural identifications vs Self-definitions

The questions themselves, seem easy on the surface, however being who I am it was hard to answer some of these questions. I don't know what role would be most fulfilling in my life

Figure 6. Sample of second iteration versus coding

In the third iteration of versus coding, I continued to revise the primary categories. In this iteration, I also developed subcategories to further appreciate the conflict relationships drawn from the data. In this third iteration, I organized the versus codes into three revised categories. These revised categories were personal conflicts, identity conflicts, and results of conflicts. Under the first category, personal conflicts, I identified four subcategories. These subcategories were: participant, family, self, and researcher. Under the second category, I identified three subcategories. These categories were: peer-to-peer mentoring program, self-definitions, and sociocultural identifications. Under the third category, I identified four subcategories. These subcategories were coworker relationships, supervisor relationships, addressing operational inefficiencies, and commitment to improving student success. In Figure 7, I provided a sample of this third iteration of versus coding.

## Third Iteration of Versus Coding

### Category 1: Personal Conflicts

#### Subcategories:

Participant  
Family  
Self  
Researcher

### Category 2: Identity Conflicts

#### Subcategories:

Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program  
Self-definitions  
Sociocultural identifications

### Category 3: Results of conflicts

#### Subcategories:

Coworker relationships  
Supervisor relationships  
Addressing operational inefficiencies  
Commitment to improving student success

Figure 7. Third iteration of versus coding

In the fourth iteration of versus coding, I developed three concepts that capture the tensions in participants' relationship with the peer-to-peer mentoring program. These concepts were developed using the third iteration categories and subcategories. These concepts were *participant vs self, family, and researcher*; *peer-to-peer mentoring program vs self-definition and sociocultural identifications*; and *commitment vs self-preservation*. In the first concept, *participant vs self, family, and researcher* referred to the identified participant conflicts with self-perception, family requirements, and researcher positionality. In the second concept, *peer-to-peer mentoring program vs self-definition and sociocultural identifications* referred to the participant conflict with cultural and familial expectations. In the third concept, *commitment vs self-preservation* refers to the identified conflict between commitment to improving practice and self-

preservation through coworker acceptance and supervisor approval. In Figure 8, I provided the results of code mapping with the identified three key concepts.

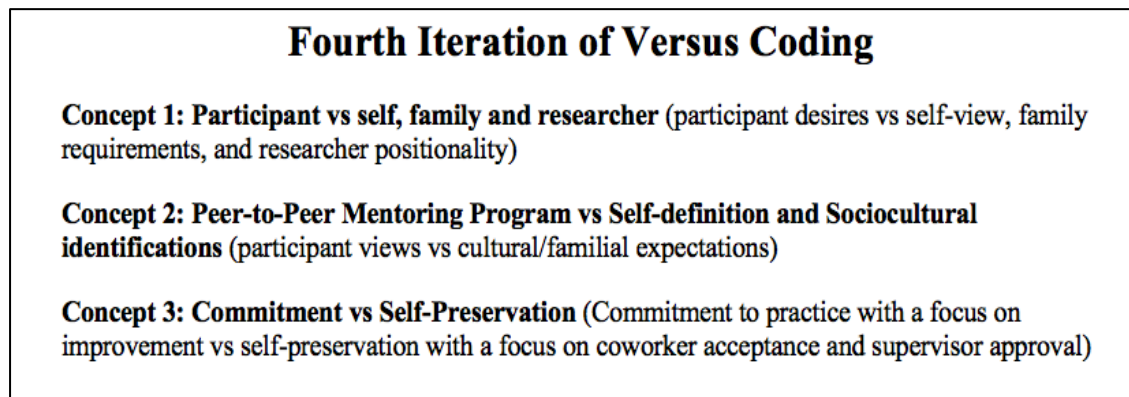


Figure 8. Sample of fourth iteration of versus coding

**Analytic memo following versus coding.** I identified versus coding in my initial memo writing following first cycle provisional coding. I identified this coding approach as appropriate due to the multiple versus relationships I identified as impactful to structural and psychological empowerment. I started coding by developing a list initial versus codes. I followed that initial versus coding with code mapping and I identified a second and third iteration of coding leading to categorization of the data and concept development. In the fourth iteration of versus coding, I identified three key concepts. Following, code mapping and concept development, I wrote an analytic memo to develop the identified concepts. I developed the three concepts using data from the qualitative sources. From this concept development, I identified categories, themes, and assertions relating to empowerment. Below is a sample analytic memo following versus coding:

In this third concept, *commitment to practice vs self-preservation*, I identified how the aforementioned conflicts may create issues or perpetuate current issues in practice. Specifically, I have identified how self-preservation with a focus on coworker acceptance and supervisor approval may impact participants' commitment to practice and the collective focus on improvement. In the previous passages I have identified some key concerns that may have negative implications

for practice. First, the transfer of familial concerns to practice may be impacting participants' development. Participants in this study, while willing and accommodating, were also at odds with themselves as it relates to what is right for them and reconciling the guilt derived from their familial relationships. Second, preoccupation with self-definitions and their sociocultural identifications may be impacting their ability to participate fully in practice.

**Axial coding and communities of practice.** To address the third research question around communities of practice, I chose axial coding as the second cycle of coding to reconnect the data around three axis codes identified from provisional coding. The categories were: *belief in capacity to achieve personal/professional goals (the domain of the program)*, *community*, and *practice*. I identified *belief in capacity to achieve personal/professional goals* as the logical domain of this program based upon the participants' contributions across multiple qualitative data sources such as weekly reflections, group dialogue sessions and focus group interview. In that material, I identified 486 instances in the data. I also identified 306 instances of community in the data. Finally, I identified 175 instances of practice in the data. From these categories (axes), I identified five themes drawn from multiple qualitative data sources such as focus group interview and follow-up interviews and reflections. These themes were as follows:

1. Understanding and appreciating self
2. Understanding and appreciating colleagues
3. Understanding/appreciating self and colleagues contributes to trust in practice
4. Trust in practice contributes to student success



## Qualitative Results

### Discussion of Assertions

After identifying all categories and themes, I returned to my previous analytical memo and viewed my earlier notions through these categories and themes. I identified several assertions based upon the values, versus, and axial categories and associated themes. To further support my learning, I returned to the qualitative data sources and identified participant quotes from the raw data as evidence to support the categories, themes, and assertions provided in Table 5 below. In Table 5, I have provided an illustration of the categories, themes, theme-related components and assertions.

In the passages that follow Table 5, I have provided further explanation of the assertions through the lens of the identified categories, themes and theme-related components from the preceding summary table. I also discussed validation of the findings through member checking and I provided a summary of the findings for this chapter.

Table 6

*Summary table of categories, themes, and assertions*

<b>Categories, Themes and Theme-related Components</b>	<b>Assertions</b>
<p><i>Category:</i> Philosophy and goals of student services team  <i>Theme:</i> The impact of harmony of authenticity  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i>                      The participants expressed some strong values such as honesty, trust, authenticity, and a non-judgmental work setting. However, honesty and authenticity were most appreciated by this group.</p> <p>In observed interactions, participants appeared to be struggling to fulfill some of their essential values completely. Specifically, in some instances, participants diverged from the value of honesty and</p>	<p>In becoming a more authentic unit, student services team members may be required to challenge the ideas of fellow colleagues. However, the desire for harmony may negatively impact the student services team members' willingness to challenge others as they work to "keep the peace."</p>

<b>Categories, Themes and Theme-related Components</b>	<b>Assertions</b>
authenticity in an effort to maintain harmony.	
<p><i>Category: Philosophy and goals of student services team</i>  <i>Theme: Commitment to public service and helping others</i>  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i>  All participants expressed a commitment to public service and a love for helping others. This desire to help others included not only meeting the expectation of helping students, but also building quality relationships with their colleagues.</p>	<p>Through peer-to-peer interactions, participants were given an opportunity to affirm their commitment to helping others and investigate why they have chosen a career in higher education.</p>
<p><i>Category: Philosophy and goals of student services team</i>  <i>Theme: The impact of learning and development on individual growth and student success</i>  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i>  Participants identified learning and multiple opportunities for growth as essential to their development as people and colleagues. Additionally, they identified their increased learning and understanding in practice as essential to improving their service to students.</p>	<p>Peer-to-peer interaction was the primary approach to learning and development in the program. However, by providing additional opportunities through videos, group dialogue, and reflection, participants benefited from varying opportunities to learn and develop.</p>
<p><i>Category: Philosophy and goals of student services team</i>  <i>Theme: Connection between family and culture and self-perception</i>  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i>  Culture and familial connections were essential to the self-definition of each participant. Some participants' self-definition was an effort to be less aligned with who their parents were at this point in their lives. Some participants sought to honor the cultural underpinnings of their self-perception and communicate their cultural stance throughout the program.</p>	<p>In the ongoing investigation of how best to redefine how problems are identified and resolved in practice, honoring the cultural/familial views of this group may provide a means for increased engagement.</p>
<p><i>Category: Personal Conflicts</i>  <i>Theme: Participant in conflict with family</i>  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i></p>	<p>The peer-to-peer mentoring program brought familial relationships into question for this group of participants and provided them with an</p>

<b>Categories, Themes and Theme-related Components</b>	<b>Assertions</b>
<p>While participants admitted to having drawn much of their self-definition from their families, they also expressed conflict with their role within those familial environments. For some participants this conflict may be impacting fulfillment in their professional lives and contributions in practice.</p>	<p>opportunity to investigate those conflicted views as they related to their interactions in the student services unit.</p>
<p><i>Category:</i> Personal Conflicts  <i>Theme:</i> Participant in conflict with self  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i> Participants identified conflicts within themselves related to their professional capabilities.</p> <p>Participants identified conflicts with their professional choices and their reasoning for those choices.</p> <p>Participants identified conflicts within themselves related to the guilt they may feel when advocating for their wellbeing.</p>	<p>The peer-to-peer mentoring program brought self-perceptions into question for this group of participants and provided them with an opportunity to investigate their conflicted views as they related to their interactions in the student services unit.</p>
<p><i>Category:</i> Personal Conflicts  <i>Theme:</i> Participant in conflict with researcher  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i> Participants expressed in observed interactions some challenges with being authentic due to the researcher's active role as a direct supervisor in the unit.</p> <p>One participant stated explicitly that they were concerned with being completely authentic in their interactions due to the researcher's active role as a direct supervisor in the unit.</p>	<p>Participants' participation in the peer-to-peer mentoring program may have been limited by the positionality of the researcher as director in the unit.</p>
<p><i>Category:</i> Identity Conflicts  <i>Theme:</i> Peer-to-peer mentoring program conflict with self-definitions and sociocultural identifications  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i> Materials and activities in the peer-to-peer mentoring program created perceived conflict for participants as it related to the self-definitions.</p>	<p>The peer-to-peer mentoring program was inadvertently offensive to some participants on a personal and cultural level while creating opportunities for other participants to investigate their self-definitions and cultural leanings.</p>

<b>Categories, Themes and Theme-related Components</b>	<b>Assertions</b>
Materials and activities in the peer-to-peer mentoring program created perceived conflict for participants at it related to their cultural and social belief systems.	
<p><i>Category:</i> Results of conflicts  <i>Theme:</i> Internal and external conflict and impact on practice  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i>  The identified internal and external conflicts may have negative impacts on developing coworker relationships in practice due to participant tendency for self-preservation in some instances while overextended themselves in others.</p>	Through peer-to-peer interactions, participants were given an opportunity to investigate internal and external conflicts that may reduce their capacity to learn and develop in practice; build quality workplace relationships; and deliver quality service to students
<p><i>Category:</i> Belief in capacity to achieve personal/professional goals  <i>Theme:</i> Understanding and appreciating self  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i>  Several participants were not sure of how they viewed or appreciated their capabilities at the beginning of the program. While they may have had some inclination about their capabilities, they had not given them much thought or fully appreciated them due to cultural/familial influences and personal views of self-identity.</p> <p>Through the use of the individual development plan, dyad discussions, and group discussions, some participants came to affirm what they initially thought of themselves, while others came to appreciate seeing themselves in a different light for the first time.</p>	Belief in the capacity to take agency in one’s own life and work in pursuit of personal and professional goals was the domain of this community of practice.
<p><i>Category:</i> Community  <i>Theme:</i> Understanding and appreciating colleagues  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i>  All participants came to recognize similarities in viewpoints, hobbies, current interests while appreciating differences in ages, experiences, and future aspirations.</p> <p>Participants recognized the value of building intentional trust relationships and the impact</p>	Participants welcomed the opportunity to connect with each other as people and learn more about themselves through the eyes of their colleagues.

Categories, Themes and Theme-related Components	Assertions
it may have on their individual development, team development and operational function in practice, and overall student success.	
<p><i>Category:</i> Practice  <i>Theme:</i> Understanding self and colleagues supports trust in practice; trust in practice supports student success  <i>Summary statements from analytic memos:</i> Participants welcomed the opportunity to meet after work and during lunch breaks to share more about who they are as people and share how they contribute to the collective mission of student success.</p> <p>Throughout the program, the participants recognized how their talents and strengths and the talents and strengths of their colleagues may fill communication gaps, support continued professional development, and create more synergy in the delivery of daily student services.</p> <p>Participants also came to view their colleagues through a more appreciative and trustful lens. They all had an opportunity to see first-hand what their colleagues work looks like and what they potentially endure on a daily basis in delivering services to students.</p>	<p>Through weekly interactions and reflections, participants were better able to connect with their essential strengths and talents and identify how they might be instrumental in improving workplace relationships and the student experience.</p>

**Philosophy and goals of student services team.** The first category of themes is the cluster related to the philosophy and goals of the student services team, and I begin with the primary reason why the mentoring program did not address the wicked problem as stated in the first research question. In the first research question, I sought learning in how peer-to-peer mentoring might improve collaboration between leaders and team members and encourage collective problem resolution in practice.

*The impact of harmony of authenticity.* In becoming a more authentic unit, student services team members may be required to challenge the ideas of fellow colleagues. However, the desire for harmony may negatively impact the student services team members' willingness to challenge others in as they work to "keep the peace.". The participants expressed some strong values such as honesty, trust, authenticity, and a non-judgmental work setting.

With regard to honesty, Carla stated:

For me, that is something that means the most. Without honesty, what else do we have? That being said, I think for both of us, especially for me, honesty and "realness" is how I relate to people (weekly reflection).

Another participant expressed her feelings and perspective on the importance of judgement-free interactions. Gloria stated, "I want them to feel that there is no judgement happening, just true care and concern (weekly reflections)." Another quotation from Gloria reflected how being in a judgment-free setting helped her think more deliberately about her current career and future professional choices.

Gloria stated,

I reflected about the past few months, and how freeing it was for me to express my innermost thoughts. The program made me start thinking with intention about my professional goal and face the reality of why I haven't pursued it (after focus group reflection).

I observed the importance of these values in our group settings in passages from the individual reflections, observations, and the focus group interview that reflected essential values. I also highlighted where some of the participants revealed occasional struggle with living to their values completely. Specifically, participants occasionally diverged from the value of honesty and authenticity where the desire for harmony may have overtaken honesty and authenticity.

In a quotation from weekly reflections, Gloria stated:

We shared that we have always had a desire to keep the peace and want everyone to get along. We also discussed how that strength sometimes turns around and backfires because we don't want to offend others in the process. An example of this might be when we abruptly change the subject during moments of tension and someone may feel their opinion or view has been dismissed (weekly reflections). I identified this as important evidence because appreciating these divergent views

may be needed as part of a developing solution to balancing power dynamics such that contributors may engage in more collaborative work within the student services unit.

***Commitment to public service and helping others.*** Through peer-to-peer interactions, participants were given an opportunity to affirm their commitment to helping others and investigate why they have chosen a career in higher education. In this second key thread across the values, beliefs, and attitudes of this group, I identified a commitment to public service and helping others. One participant discussed her commitment and described her inspiration in her current work.

Kayla stated:

Talking about helping student and public service made me feel inspired about what we do for the institution we work for. It also made me reflect that I'd like to stay in this profession and also start focusing and furthering my education so I can do more and be able to help a lot of students (weekly reflections).

I identified this evidence as important to bridging the perceived gap between leaders and team members. Throughout the program, participants affirmed their commitment to helping others. Through connections within their partner relationships and the larger group, participants articulated where that commitment is derived from. One participant expressed that her commitment is derived from her drive to support the *underdog*. Carla stated, "I would say I have always enjoyed helping people...especially what I would consider the "underdogs" of any circumstance...overcome obstacles and get ahead (weekly reflections)." This evidence is important because capitalizing on this viewpoint

may be one approach to addressing this group's desire for harmony in instances where harmony may not lead to the most effective student success initiatives in practice.

*The impact of learning and development on individual growth and student success.* Peer-to-peer interaction was the primary approach to learning and development in the program. However, by providing additional opportunities through videos, group dialogue, and reflection, participants benefited from varying opportunities to learn and develop. In this third key thread, learning and development is vital to the competence of this group and their ability to support the learning of students. However, how that learning is delivered came through various means. In the mentoring program, I provided peer-to-peer interactions supported by videos and group dialogue and reflection. Some appreciated the videos, while others gained more from the group dialogue and reflection. However, they all appreciated the individual dyads impact on their learning and development in practice. One participant expressed appreciation for the videos as support material for weekly interactions with her partner.

Kayla stated:

The program is broken into weekly sessions with video aides that bring additional supporting materials that relate to the week's topic. Since I am a visual learner, I found these to be fun to watch and also jotted down notes so that I could use them as a reference when working on my weekly topics (letter to the next cohort).

Gloria appreciated the group interactions. She stated, "I picked up on things that I wouldn't think of before. It was just a nice way to be introspective, mull over things, address my own biases (focus group interview)." All participants appreciated the individual dyads' impact on their learning and development in practice.

Stacey stated:

I valued the insight of what my peer does. I had no idea about what they do. I got a greater appreciation for what others do. Before this I didn't know anything



about my peer as a person or their upbringing or where their values come from. Knowing this explains where their values come from. It's very cool to know who they are at their core (focus group interview).

Knowing this group's appreciation for learning and how they learn best is essential because it provides me with insight into how best to construct future iterations of this study and program. I chose to not cater to one approach over another. Rather, I provided varying opportunities to learn and challenged participants to contribute in all of them.

*Connection between family and culture and self-perception.* In the ongoing investigation of how best to redefine how problems are identified and resolved in practice, honoring the cultural/familial views of this group may provide a means for increased engagement. The connection to culture and family was essential to the self-perception of the participants in this research study and peer-to-peer mentoring program. Specifically, participants reflected upon their culture and attributed their origins as the foundation for their world view and their approach to the workplace. Keith stated, "We are the way we are because of our upbringing and the culture we were exposed to (weekly reflections)." Another participant expressed their appreciation for the various experiences that he shared with his mentoring-program partner.

Kevin stated:

We were proud of our "worldly" experience. Being from a military family, a person encounters many different races, ethnicities, and etc. on a daily basis. With that said, we are able to have conversations and relate to almost everyone (weekly reflections).

This evidence is important because developing a more culturally appreciative workplace and leveraging the varied cultural and experiential backgrounds may have positive impacts for our student services unit and our students. As participants see

themselves more represented in the social fabric of the unit, they may be more inclined to contribute in the collective work of improving student success. Moreover, as students see a more culturally diverse and connected practice, they may feel more connected to the institution. This may have positive impacts on key community college measurements such retention and degree completion.

**Personal Conflicts.** The second category of themes is the cluster related to the personal conflicts and I begin with the primary reason why the mentoring program was not empowering as stated in the second research question. In the second research question, I sought learning in how peer-to-peer mentoring might contribute to the redistribution of power dynamics with the student services unit on a joint military base.

***Participant in conflict with family.*** The peer-to-peer mentoring program brought familial relationships into question for this group of participants and provided them with an opportunity to investigate those conflicted views as they relate to their interactions in the student services unit. As it relates to participants conflict with family, participants shared challenges with their partners. One participant explained that they are not able to share themselves completely in their home life due to familial role designations. The participant's partner, Gloria, stated, "When we discussed if we have possessed our talent throughout our lives, my partner disclosed that they only expressed their talent outside of the home. This made me sad, but I could definitely relate (weekly reflections)." This conflict is important due to the multiple interactions I identified across multiple data sources such weekly reflections, researcher observational journaling, and the focus group interview where participants shared their family histories. They shared how those histories have contributed to their self-definitions and their perceptions about interactions within the workplace. As it relates to redistributing power dynamics, understanding how

participants view power relationships may be essential to the leveling hierarchy and connecting participant capabilities to opportunities for improvement.

*Participant in conflict with self.* The peer-to-peer mentoring program brought self-perceptions into question for this group of participants and provided them with an opportunity to investigate their conflicted views as they related to their interactions in the student services unit. I also identified multiple instances where participants' personal and professional goals and aspirations may have been in direct opposition with participants' self-perception. Participants expressed several instances where they were personally uncomfortable during the program where questions arose that uncovered personal issues. Some participants were having challenges acknowledging their personal and professional goals. They expressed fear of retribution from family and friends for owning their goals.

Gloria stated:

Interacting with my partner really helped me face the action steps that I need to take. My stretch plan has always been in the back of my mind and it was refreshing to actually speak it out loud.....without fear of negative response (weekly reflections).

This participant also alluded to wounds that had not healed, which may be impacting their goal setting and fulfillment in their current work.

In a letter to the next participants, Gloria stated:

You will also find that deep wounds and repressed feelings may rise to the surface, but that's how you can begin to heal. Sometimes we think that we are able to handle repressed feelings but sometimes we need to enlist someone to walk beside us and help us through to healing.

While addressing buried hopes and hurts was not a goal of the program, it is important to understand the participants as people in an effort to create a more appreciative practice. Understanding where participants derive power and where their

perceived power is weakened is essential to addressing how best to redistribute power within this unit.

Participant self-perception also revealed the challenges stemming from their collective valuing of harmonious environments. Specifically, some participants self-identified challenges related to pleasing others and avoiding judgements. One participant expressed a desire to pursue a career goal now that her family is in a good place.

Gloria stated:

Even now with older kids and settled, oh my gosh this is the first time I've spoken out what I want to do. I'm always just doing. It was always getting my kids to the next level. Now it's a time to get me to the next level. Interacting with someone who's not judging helps (focus group interview).

Another participant expressed a concern for doing too much for others at the expense of her personal happiness and fulfillment. Carla stated, "It may also be pressure I put on myself to be too many things for too many people...I think I feel far too responsible for things I shouldn't." These statements have implications for practice due to these participants' identified tendency to please others and the value placed on this approval. In relationships with colleagues and leaders, participants may be challenged to speak up on their behalf. If unable to do so, their work relationships be at risk of becoming imbalanced and inequitable.

In connecting with students, participants may take on more responsibility for student progress than is recommended. In doing so, they may not recognize the potential for partnership in learning with the student or they may not demonstrate the confidence needed to convey this message without becoming overtaken by their desire for harmony. Recognizing this challenge, Gloria explained, "that strength sometimes turns around and backfires because we don't want to offend others in the process." Keith stated, "I also

like people to like me, but I do know that I cannot please everyone so this could be a weakness at the same time.” These identified conflicts with self are essential because redistributing power in practice may require some targeted professional development in these identified problem areas.

*Participant in conflict with researcher.* Participants’ contributions during the peer-to-peer mentoring program may have been limited by the positionality of the researcher as a director in the unit. I observed multiple interactions and reviewed multiple reflections, especially in the early weeks of the program, where I was concerned about the participants’ comfort level with me as the researcher and as an active leader in the student services unit. In the opening weeks of the program, multiple participants expressed to me directly “I want to make sure I'm giving you what you want.” I was also concerned about the quality of interaction during the early weeks of the program. As the program progressed and some discomforts were lessened, the quality improved. However, after observing these interactions and responses in the reflections, I noted in my researcher journal, “I am concerned that many of the participants are so entrenched in leader/led scenarios that my presence may be challenging to their development as it relates to empowerment and redistributing power dynamics.” I found that participants were actually struggling with more than my presence in context. Still, my presence was significant to participants’ ability to engage meaningfully and authentically. At member checking, one participant did express this concern.

The participant stated:

I think if this program were to be done again, the participants should not be “under” the researcher as far as work roles. There were parts of this program that asked about how we felt about our workplace, etc. which can be uncomfortable to talk about to your direct supervisor and can cause you to feel like you cannot be 100% honest with your answers. Although each participant was assigned an ID

number to be anonymous, we emailed our responses to James so it really wasn't anonymous. Overall, the conversations that we had in our peer-to-peer meetings were very beneficial and I certainly learned more about myself and my colleagues and am grateful for that experience (member checking response).

This evidence is essential to understanding the challenges I might be facing in learning how to redistribute power dynamics in this unit. It is also essential in deciding whether to continue pursuing this question and using peer-to-peer mentoring in its current form as an appropriate innovation.

**Identity conflicts: Peer-to-peer mentoring program conflict with self-definitions and sociocultural identifications.** The peer-to-peer mentoring program was inadvertently offensive to some participants on a personal and cultural level while creating opportunities for other participants to investigate their self-definitions and cultural leanings. Self-definition and sociocultural identifications were prevalent from the beginning. I began the program with an opening week called “define yourself.” As the program progressed toward discussions of strengths and talents, some participants took hard stances against the questions being asked in the individual development plan (IDP) based upon the self-definitions that were articulated in the first week. Kevin stated, “Having conversations with my peer mentor with these questions, challenged me a bit as I don't really think about these types of questions in my daily life. Plus, I am not one that really tries to talk about myself (weekly reflections).” Gloria added, “We both realized that we both had the notion that to talk about our strengths is a bit uncomfortable (weekly reflections).” I noted this conflict because of its significance to continued use of the individual development plan (IDP) and future iterations of the study and program. Participants repeatedly grappled with the questions in the IDP and their self-definitions.

One participant, Kevin, expressed several challenges and was the most vocal about his concerns. Below are several excerpts that illustrate his views.

Kevin expressed his challenge with the questions about strengths and weaknesses:

This question is a little tricky one, for me and my partner as we are Asian so speaking up about our strengths is somewhat akin to bragging and boasting, and within Asian societies that is a cultural taboo (weekly reflections).

There is a popular idiom in Japan that states, “the nail that stands out, gets hammered down,” so societal harmony is valued above all else (weekly reflections).

Being American, you are kind of drawn into an area where being braggadocios and showcasing your strengths is rewarded or admired. Sometimes it’s difficult to tip toe this line to find a comfortable balance (weekly reflections).

Kevin expressed his challenge with the question about life and professional fulfillment:

I just feel as if this question is a little bit unfair because I always want to have sense of evolving and not being the same person. If I reach a state of being most fulfilled, I know that I’m going to move onto something else and then that new state will be the most fulfilled and so on. I try not to think of things in such extreme terms.

This evidence is important due to implications for continued use of the individual development plan (IDP) in future iterations of the study and mentoring program.

Understanding how potential participants might view the questions asked may provide insight into the tool’s efficacy during the program. This conclusion is supported by a quotation from the focus group interview. During the focus group interview, Stacey stated, “You don’t really think about the questions in the IDP, but do we really know them or understand them? I didn’t really think that that’s what I thought about my strengths and my weaknesses.”

### **Results of conflicts: Internal and external conflict and impact on practice.**

Through peer-to-peer interactions, participants were given an opportunity to investigate

internal and external conflicts that may reduce their capacity to learn and develop in practice; build quality workplace relationships; and deliver quality service to students. I identified how the aforementioned conflicts may create issues or perpetuate current issues in practice. Specifically, I have identified how self-preservation with a focus on coworker acceptance and supervisor approval may impact participants' commitment to practice and the collective focus on improvement. In the previous passages I have identified some key concerns that may have negative implications for practice. First, the transfer of familial concerns to practice may be impacting participants' development. Participants in this study, while willing and accommodating, were also at odds with themselves as it related to what is right for them and reconciling the guilt derived from their familial relationships. Second, preoccupation with self-definitions and their sociocultural identifications may be impacting their ability to participate fully in practice.

Examples of current challenges in practice were difficult to gather from this group due to perceived and stated participant concern over my positionality and voicing their opinions aloud. Still, I have identified some current issues that may highlight some of the challenges articulated above. In one instance of conflict in practice, a participant discussed how their partner is limited in who they can connect with when they have a daily operational issue.

Gloria stated:

I also learned that my partner has had difficulty getting assistance when reaching out to someone who is not their supervisor (but they feel more comfortable with this person). My partner then has been told to always go to their supervisor and it has been a struggle in more ways than one (weekly reflections).

In another instance, a participant expressed concern about the level of commitment of their colleagues.



Kayla stated:

I strive to do my job well every day because I know that it matters and there are days that I feel like some of my co-workers on the team don't care about the job and they are just simply there because they are in the payroll system or the benefits of working for higher education (after focus group reflection).

There may always be varying levels of commitment in work environments. However, knowing that commitment levels are palpable enough to be mentioned in this study is essential to addressing empowerment in future iterations of the program. Empowerment requires engagement. Commitment to serving others was also identified as an essential value for these participants. If participants perceive that commitment levels are not to the level they value, they may become less engaged. Reduced engagement may limit opportunities to address lowering hierarchy and redistributing power for improved practice. In a final issue drawn from the data, a participant expressed concern over their being managed too closely and lacking the latitude in practice to demonstrate their capabilities. Stacey stated, "I feel I don't have the space I need to showcase my strengths. I'm over managed (weekly reflection)." The perceived lack of latitude for entry-level decision making may be reducing participants' perceptions of empowerment.

The peer-to-peer mentoring program did not increase empowerment for this group. Rather, the program allowed the researcher to discern factors that may empower these participants and factors that may reduce empowerment. Due to participant challenges with multiple aspects of the program such as sociocultural identifications, the individual development plan (IDP), and the researcher as a director in the unit, the peer-to-peer mentoring program may need revision to appropriately answer the second research question.

**Belief in capacity to achieve personal/professional goals.** In this first of three categories focused on communities of practice (CoP), I first identify the logical domain as the belief in the capacity to take agency in one's own life and work in pursuit of personal and professional goals. Participants had varying degrees of appreciation of self at beginning of the peer-to-peer mentoring program. While they had a general idea of their capabilities, they did not view strengths from appreciative lens. Through IDP discussions with peer and group interactions, several participants developed an improved understanding of their views about themselves and the origin of those views. As their capabilities and motivations became clearer, they became less ambiguous about how they define themselves and how they articulate their capabilities. From this improved viewpoint, some participants became more communicative with their supervisors regarding their development.

One participant stated:

I enjoyed learning about my strengths. I've just met with my supervisor and used these conversations to better articulate what I want in my development. Life goals was key take way because if you say it out loud, you might want to do it, you might want to try (focus group interview).

Some participants agreed that the peer-to-peer mentoring program helps build confidence. One participant stated, "It's okay to put my strengths in a good light and view them favorably and not concentrate so heavily on what you could have done better. You do many things really wonderfully (focus group interview)." After participation in the program, the participants stated that they had an improved view of themselves and how they might contribute to the collective whole in certain situations. Some participants stated that the going back-and-forth with a partner helped them clarify their fit within the group and visualize how best to contribute to the larger group. Carla stated, "When you

start owning that and feeling it more, I can see what I'm really good at and I can see what you're really good at and we can put these two things together to create this greater thing (after focus group interview).”

**Community: Understanding and appreciating colleagues.** In this second category of community, I discussed the primary reason why the peer-to-peer mentoring program fulfilled the community element of a community of practice (CoP). Participants welcomed the opportunity to connect with each other as people and learn more about themselves through the eyes of their colleagues. Through participation in the peer-to-peer mentoring program, I identified evidence of participants' realization of the importance of building workplace relationships. Some admitted to not always feeling comfortable going to other colleagues prior to program. However, after interacting with a partner and within the larger group, some participants came to see their colleagues as more approachable. Further, some even identified some colleagues as their “go-to-person” in workplace.

Keith said of his partner:

I think she knew me in terms of what I used to be, I was in the military, I was a NCO. But now I think knowing her more and she knows me a little more as an actual person I think she's more approachable and I think I'm more approachable (after focus group interview).

Some participants also expressed how everyone has an interesting story to tell. As they listened to and learned about their partners' stories, they discovered similarities in experiences, aspirations, hobbies, and personal traits.

Keith stated:

I found it interesting to see what the similarities and differences were that I had with my partner since we were teamed up throughout the IDP. Although we have a gap in age, I found it interesting that we had similar upbringing that resulted in being a hard worker, wanting to help others and continually learn (letters to the next cohort).

Some participants saw the peer-to-peer mentoring program as a great opportunity to learn from and about their colleagues. At the start, they may have known each other from a distance. After completing the program, they came to know each other as people. With the additional insight into their work and how they interact with students, they gained a greater appreciation of their colleagues' daily work challenges. Some participants also developed an understanding of how their partners interact with tools and other job essential materials to support students. One participant realized that they must rely on each other to serve students effectively.

Keith stated:

So the student is the focus, so we are all here to support that one student, me trying to be more personable, trying to figure out how registration works, me asking about testing, I mean that's actually helping the student as a whole for better service (after focus group interview).

**Practice: Understanding self and colleagues supports trust in practice; trust in practice supports student success.** Through weekly interactions and reflections, participants expressed that they were able to connect with their essential strengths and talents and identify how they might be more instrumental in improving workplace relationships and the student experience. Participants realized how improving the internal environment creates a better environment for students. Throughout the program, they detailed how their interactions with their partners grew to be insightful, full of trust, open, and honest. They stated that their collective goal is to help students. To do so, they identified reliance upon each other as essential. Without connection, they stated that they are unsure how to trust their colleagues. Stacey stated, "I realized how important it is to build better relationships with the people that I work with. I think this is very important because it strengthens the team environment which in turn betters the workplace overall."

The participants felt that knowing their colleagues' values and what defines them helps build confidence in the workplace. Thereby, making their colleagues go-to-people in workplace for certain situations. Additionally, the participants believed that strong relationships increase workplace happiness and productivity. According to the participants, the end result can put students at ease.

Participants also recognized the value of trust in themselves and the impact on student success. They stated that knowing and understanding themselves allows them to be more effective in serving students. Conversely, not appreciating their essential gifts may negatively impact student success. They expressed that connecting to their personal experiences may help in creating better service to students. Further, learning from each other to include essential job functions helps them bridge gaps in communication. Doing so gives them comfort in explaining what comes next to students. Participants also acknowledged that by using their strengths they can be more creative in how they present opportunities to students and in helping them overcome challenges and obstacles. Carla stated, "Because If I have a student who is struggling, then I can look at my own strengths and kind of think outside of the box, maybe think of ways they can figure out how to overcome their obstacles (after focus group interview)."

### **Member Checking**

In late summer, I sent a member checking document to the six participants with my tentative findings. I chose to send via email due to some participants being away on vacations. I provided them with an explanation of what member checking is and I described what I was asking of them. I also provided them with a date of submission and I invited them to submit all responses to my primary researcher in this study, Dr. Sherman Dorn. I provided his email contact in the document. The due date I provided for

responses was a week later, providing the participants with a full week including a weekend to review and respond. In Appendix E, I provided the member checking document that I sent to participants for review. All participants responded to Dr. Dorn, five of which responded within two weeks. All identifiers were removed from the responses, which were collated and sent to me via my student email.

The results of member checking were confirmative with no suggestions for alterations, additions, or deletions. Additionally, all six participants were appreciative of having participated in the study and the experiences gained from the program. One participant stated, “I do like how the language of the findings are written in a collective way. Not too specific of each individual’s thoughts but detailed description on our collective discussions and findings. I don’t have any corrections or have anything to add. I felt that my reflections and thoughts during the discussions is collectively well written.” Another participant added, “I really enjoyed being part of the study. It was enlightening, and thought provoking. I truly appreciate being a part of a group learning experience that yields individual and professional growth.” While all participants shared their positive views of the program and study, one participant did share a concern for my positionality. I captured this concern in the results above. Additionally, I noted this concern in my observational journaling throughout the study and program.

### **Summary of Findings**

Participation in the peer-to-peer mentoring program provided participants with an opportunity to articulate their values, beliefs, and attitudes. While many of these values held true, I observed interactions that were incongruent with some of their stated values. In particular, participants valued harmony while also valuing honesty and authenticity. Some participants noted that in valuing harmony, they sometimes forgo honesty and

authenticity in an effort to “keep the peace.” This view may be challenging to a community of practice (CoP) as developing comfort with challenging the ideas of others may serve to strengthen the CoP by engaging others in the questioning and learning needed to improve practice. Moreover, student success may be impacted due to the lack of appropriate advocacy for student-centered initiatives that may improve the learning environment for all students.

Participation in the peer-to-peer mentoring program provided participants with an opportunity to confront the internal and external conflicts that may have impacted their ability to build strong relationships with fellow team members and students. Participants expressed three key challenges. First, participants were in conflict with people. Primarily, participants were at odds with their own personal view of their capabilities and opportunities. As the program progressed, participants had an opportunity to investigate these challenges. However, by the end of the program, participants appeared to be only beginning to tangle with those challenges. Participants were also in conflict with their families. All participants honored their families and the impact of their parents and extended family members. Some were also at odds with how they were viewed in their familial spaces. Some participants indicated that some of their personal and professional choices, may have been different with a different level of support from their families.

Throughout the program, I was concerned about my positionality as a director in the unit. I observed some instances where participants may be giving answers that were more favorable to management. I got some informal feedback from participants such as “I want to make sure I’m giving you what you want.” However, I did not get any direct feedback to support this concern until the member checking process. One participant expressed directly that they were challenged by my positionality as a researcher and

direct supervisor within the unit. While there was only one instance, I have also identified harmony as a strong value of these participants. This desire for harmony, may have impacted others willingness to share similar concerns. Therefore, the one instance is noted as something to watch for in future iterations of the study and program.

Second, participants were in conflict with questions from the individual development plan (IDP) and their self-definition and/or sociocultural identifications. The questions from the IDP asked participants to do the following: define yourself; identify your strengths and weaknesses; identify your talents; articulate your most fulfilling endeavor; and develop a plan to catapult you forward. While my intent was not to wound or undervalue the participant's cultural and personal leanings, the questions and activities of the program caused some discomfort for these participants. For some participants, the IDP also helped them identify the conflicts that they were not aware of or were not willing to acknowledge. These identified binary relationships may have negatively impacted their level of empowerment in this program. These relationships also provided the researcher with insight into what might be most the empowering work environment for this group. Additional cycles of research in practice may be needed to fully articulate these challenges and develop an innovation that may help this group connect more immediately with their capabilities as it relates to connecting with team members and delivering services to students.

This group of participants expressed some strong views around self-preservation such that the level of commitment to students and each other may not be as strong as they stated in submitted qualitative sources. Specifically, some participants were concerned about how they are perceived by their coworkers and supervisors. This preoccupation is noted because the participants also expressed that they are committed to public service



and serving others. In some interactions with students, delivering unfavorable news to students may be unpleasant but necessary. The same may be said of connecting with fellow team members in practice. The choice the participants may gravitate to with regard to these divergent views may have implications that improve services to students and connections in practice or reduce productivity in practice due to fear of rejection and/or retribution.

Through participation in the peer-to-peer mentoring program, participants were able to investigate their capacity to take agency in their own life and work in pursuit of personal and professional goals. Through the program design and coordination, the participants had a unique opportunity to learn from each other while appreciating their individual capabilities more deliberately. The participants expressed discomfort with several aspects of the program and many of them were personal. However, they demonstrated courage and came to appreciate the opportunity to discuss their personal and professional development. Through weekly interactions and reflections, participants were better able to connect as a community with an eye toward improving practice. By the program's end, some participants began connecting their interactions to workplace productivity and improving services to students. Still, additional investigation is needed to unpack the identified challenges to empowerment. Also, I framed the problem of practice as a wicked problem with the wickedity occurring within the leader to staff dynamic. Through this study and program, I have found that the wickedity may be more appropriately seated within the multiple intersects in these participants' lives.

The next chapter is a discussion of these results in relation to the extant literature that framed this study and/or previous research completed prior to this study. I have also identified additional literature that may support this study and future iterations.

Additionally, a discussion of implications, lessons learned, and the potential next cycle of research are also discussed.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I explain the germaneness of the research and innovation as it relates to the current local and larger context within and beyond the student services unit at Pierce College at Joint Base – Lewis McChord (JBLM). I will make connections to the literature identified prior to the study and associated innovation. Further, I will include a discussion of implications for student services units and the student services unit at Pierce College at JBLM. Within this section, I will also include a discussion of transferability.

In a discussion of the lessons learned, I detail the practices that were most impactful during the study, explain the aspects of the study and program that were challenging and include some preliminary thoughts on resolving those challenges. To conclude this section, I will discuss what can be added to this study in the form of research and program revision that may improve the research questions, program development and delivery, and support the meaning making of the next group of participants.

#### **Discussion of the Results**

In this section, I discussed how I did not answer research questions one and two. I describe the learning gained through evaluation of the peer-to-peer mentoring program they may support answering the first two research questions in future iterations of the study. I also discussed how I answered research question three. In my explanations, I referred to the theoretical perspectives guiding the study and include discussion of any additional theories identified during my investigation.

## **Answering the Research Questions**

In the subsections that follow, I start my discussion of results by explaining why I was not able to completely answer research question one and what I learned. I refer back to Rittel and Webber's (1973) key elements of wicked problems and frame my discussion around those key tenets. I follow my discussion of wicked problems, with a discussion of empowerment.

I begin my explanation of the second research question with a discussion of structural empowerment. I framed this discussion around Kanter's (1977) theory of structural empowerment by identifying the elements of the program that may have contributed to making peer-to-peer mentoring structurally empowering. I continue my discussion of empowerment by discussing the areas of Zimmerman's (1990) theory of psychological empowerment. I explain the areas of the program that may have reduced participants' psychological empowerment based upon their perceptions of cultural awareness and self-efficacy. I included additional research in this discussion from Bandura's (2005) theory of self-efficacy to explain participants' evolving views of their capabilities throughout the program.

Finally, I conclude this section with a discussion of how I answered the third research question. I start my discussion with Wenger's (1998) theory of social learning and communities of practice. I frame my discussion in domain, community, and practice. I also discuss Wenger's (1998) expanded view of these three essential elements, describing them as joint enterprise, mutuality of engagement, and shared repertoire. I continue my conversation by discussing the five components of Hoadley and Kilner's (2007) C4P model. The five components are purpose, content, conversations, connections

and context. I explain the materials and activities that I used in the program to operationalize this model.

**Wicked Problems.** RQ1: In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program encourage a transition from an environment of predetermined problems and solutions by management to a collaborative culture of inquiry and problem resolution? I could not answer this research question completely. Rather, I learned more about the causal factors contributing to the problem.

The following factors may have contributed to how participants perceived themselves in leader and team dynamics. Most of the challenges in the workplace were not related to the workplace. However, these challenges may have contributed to how participants perceived themselves and their roles within the context under investigation. According to Rittel and Webber (1973), a clear answer to the social issue presented in the research question may be unlikely due to the influence of the current context and social constructs surrounding the problem. Throughout the study and program, there several instances where each participant was struggling with internal or external challenges. Some of these challenges included the following: an incomplete depiction of their capabilities; unfulfilled professional aspirations; struggle between self-care and caring for others; a desire to keep the peace at the expense of their belief in honesty and authenticity; and personal/cultural challenges with the individual development plan,

The individual development plan (IDP) as a professional development tool and community artifact challenged each participant to discuss strengths, weaknesses, and talents with intentionality. That process in effect disclosed how participants viewed relationships with members of the unit, including leadership. At the start, the participants

viewed relationships with colleagues as strictly work relationships. After going through the process, some participants' views were altered. These participants came to view their partners as *go-to persons* in practice and *accountability partners* in their personal/professional growth. Some participants also identified that they were uncomfortable being truthful with supervisors, but the conversations during this process may have led to at least one participant reframing their next conversation with their leader such that they were able to have an improved dialogue.

I also able identified where these participants might derive power for themselves as it relates to problem formulation and resolution. That turned out to be honoring their essential values. Repeatedly, participants articulated their values, beliefs, and attitudes. Developing an appreciative practice such participants are able to reframe their professional development activities and daily interactions from this lens may provide the foundation for altering power dynamics in this unit such that we might get at collaborative problem definition and resolution. According to Rittel and Webber (1973), resolving one issue may reveal or cause another. Use of the IDP and other accompanying materials during the peer-to-peer mentoring program enabled me to expand my view of the problem and identify some opportunities where we might improve practice.

**Empowerment.** RQ2: In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program support the redistribution of power dynamics within student services? I identified where the program was structurally empowering according to Kanter's (1977) theory of structural empowerment. However, I could not completely answer this research question due to multiple challenges to participant's perceptions of psychological empowerment. I learned more about the multiple conflict relationships that were active during the study. Some of

these conflicts were personal and introduced as a result of close interactions with a peer partner.

Participants utilized the conversation and reflective spaces to grapple with internal challenges that might impact their ability to engage fully in practice and move forward with their professional aspirations. I also learned what additional research may be needed to further understand participant perceptions and fully address this research question. I have identified appreciative inquiry from the previous discussion of wicked problems. I identified Bandura's (2005) self-efficacy as additional research that might inform and strengthen this study and program.

***Structural empowerment.*** According to Kanter (1977), structural empowerment is stimulated within organizations that offer the appropriate access to information and resources, managerial and team support, and varying opportunities to learn and develop. Through my observations and participant revelations in reflections and interviews, I identified building a personal connection to coworkers as essential to structural empowerment. However, I had an unspoken assumption about empowerment prior to the study and research project grounded in Kanter's (1977) essentials. I assumed that by providing participants with the information needed to effectively engage in the program, continuous access to the program coordinator, and multiple opportunities to share and learn would provide the necessary foundation to empower this group. However, access to information and resources was not a chief concern for this group at the outset. Instead, access to each other as people proved to be more salient. Access to information only became important during "shadow week" when participants were able to spend one to two hours learning their partner's job functions and role within the student services unit. The entire program was built around team support, which was appreciated by this group.

Also, through completion of the individual develop plan (IDP), participants became more connected to themselves personally and professionally. In doing so, they became more aware of their coworkers and the impact of an interconnected work unit on student success.

The peer-to-peer mentoring program provided varying opportunities to learn and develop through multiple forms of engagement. First, to introduce each week of the individual development plan (IDP), I provided the participants with a YouTube video(s) for each topic of the IDP to help energize their thinking around the dyad and group conversations. Second, the participants met weekly in their dyads to discuss their answers to the IDP questions for that week. Third, following these dyad meetings, participants were asked to write a reflection about their interactions. Finally, participants met with me each week to debrief about the week's activities. This interplay between dyad conversations, individual reflections, and group dialogue with videos helped the participants become immersed in the program, flesh out their thoughts, and articulate those thoughts in multiple ways.

***Psychological empowerment.*** According to Zimmerman (1990), psychological empowerment is a contextually-based phenomenon that grapples with the fit between individual and environment. Some key components of this theory include internal and external factors such as collective action, skill development, and cultural awareness. Additionally, it incorporates personality factors such as motivation to control, locus of control, and self-efficacy. I identified the primary factors that were essential to the meaning making for this group as cultural awareness and self-efficacy. In this study and during the program, how participants perceived themselves in relation to these two factors had a direct impact on their perceptions of empowerment. According to



Zimmerman (1990), in-depth qualitative inquiry is a more appropriate research approach to investigate these causal factors. The peer-to-peer mentoring program was evaluated through qualitative sources to determine the causal factors that influenced participants' psychological empowerment within a community college at joint military base.

*Cultural Awareness.* Throughout the program, I noted that cultural awareness had both positive and negative impacts on participants perceptions of power. Cultural challenges were most evident in participants' responses to the questions in the individual development plan (IDP). Some participants struggled with the language of the questions. The Western terms used, and the perceived notion of *bragging* challenged some participants in ways I had not intended. I framed the IDP as a peer-supported conversation with *the self* about *the self*. However, some participants saw it as bragging. Others saw the questions as interview questions for a job and had not considered them with any previous intentionality. Thus, I had not considered the cultural and personal interpretations of these questions prior to the study. In retrospect, I do not think that I would have known of these perceptions without asking these questions and collecting qualitative data on how they were answered. According Zimmerman (1990), empowered persons have the ability to identify the elements within their *life domains* that influence their capacity to make decisions about what is important to them. To address the cultural conflicts revealed during the peer-to-peer mentoring program in future work, I would investigate opportunities to create a more culturally appreciative version of the IDP that provides varying opportunities for participants to reframe questions based upon their personal narratives.

*Self-efficacy.* Bandura (2005) describes self-efficacy as a person's ability to exercise personal agency in one's own life. This personal agency is dependent upon the

context and adaptability of the environment. These include the imposed, selected, and created environments. The selected environment is one where individuals may have opportunities and barriers and returns and penalties.

The context of this study and program was an example of a selected environment. There were certain affordances and limitations that participants would accept upon selection (Bandura, 2005). Therefore, self-efficacy was dependent upon what the participants were willing to appreciate within and draw from the environment. This group of participants expressed some strong views around self-preservation such that the level of commitment to students and each other may not be as strong as they stated in some qualitative sources. Specifically, some participants were concerned about how they were perceived by their coworkers and supervisors. This preoccupation is noted because the participants also expressed that they are committed to public service and serving others. In some interactions with students, delivering unfavorable news to students may be unpleasant but necessary. The same may be said of connecting with fellow team members in practice, but participants explained that group harmony overrode the value of transparency. The choice the participants may gravitate to with regard to these divergent views may have implications that improve services to students and connections in practice or reduce productivity in practice due to fear of rejection and/or retribution.

I identified a challenge with permission to move forward in reflections as participants discussed their personal and professional goals. Many had placed their goals on hold or abandoned them completely due to family, culture, and his/her individual position within those dynamics. Participants had great ideas for both self – and team-improvement. However, I perceived that they were waiting for permission to act. From observations, group discussions, and reflections, I reasoned that empowerment in the

workplace is impacted by more than work environment or leadership approach. For these participants, culture, family upbringing and observance of family members' lived experiences significantly affected their world view and self-portrait such that they were not able to engage fully and exercise personal agency. I identified from these participants a need to develop capacity to take agency in their own life and work such that they might achieve their desired goals and become more fulfilled within their roles in the student services unit on a joint military base. Developing more challenging but appreciative environments in practice may support participants' connecting more immediately to their capabilities in practice.

During the program, I modified the peer-to-peer mentoring program by adding "shadow week" to the program. I did so to give participants the perceived permission to move forward with one of their stated requests. At the orientation, I invited the participants to visit their partner's work to learn more about their daily functions and role within the student services unit. Later, I altered the selected environment of the study by instituting a specific "shadow week" to give participants the liberation to follow through on this encouragement to connect with their partner's job essential functions and to learn more about their role in student services' mission. This addition to the program in essence gave the participants needed permission to pursue this option.

**Communities of Practice.** RQ3: In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, where and when does participation in a peer-mentoring program engender greater mutual support of colleagues and understanding of team roles, and encourage sharing of workplace artifacts that might improve practice? I developed the peer-to-peer mentoring program as a community of practice with Wenger's (1998) description of competent membership. The three components to competent membership

include mutuality of engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. *Mutuality of engagement* is the ability to build relationships based upon engagement with members and reciprocating actions. Membership in this CoP was based upon building personal and professional relationships with peers through frequent dyad and group discussions. Identity was established through immersion and continuous participation. Essentially, the *joint enterprise* was improving connection to self and colleagues in order to improve practice. The participants began taking responsibility for this joint enterprise. However, the program fell short of the negotiating the community's continued pursuit. *Shared repertoire* included sharing routines; exchanging tools used to serve students in practice; discussing life experiences related to personal and professional journeys; and offering tips, stories, and ideas that may be adopted to support the community's continued existence.

**Domain.** I did not predetermine a domain for this community. By reviewing the multiple data sources such as weekly reflections, researcher journal entries, and the focus group interview, I identified improving the ability to take personal agency in one's own life and work as the logical domain for this community of practice (CoP). Each participant was committed to improvement. However, the improvement for most was not initially grounded in the workplace. Rather, the program was constructed such that participants had to review their own capabilities, reflect upon them with their peer, and then apply them to practice. There were several elements that supported arriving at this domain of improving self to improve practice. First, participants were bringing multiple cultural and social perspectives into their relationship building. Second, participants had strong values and self-definitions that they were drawn out by their participation. Third,

participants were challenged to investigate their self-definitions as part of developing their individual development plans.

**Community.** Community was built through participation. Continuous participation was built in the program design. Participants were asked to meet for at one hour per week with their peer mentor. I also asked participants to meet with me as a group for one hour per week. Finally, participants were asked to complete their individual development plans and complete an individual reflection following each weekly meeting. As result, I identified a growing community of learning professionals throughout the program. All participants to varying degrees benefitted from small group to larger group interactions. Each began to make connections to how they fit in their role and how their role supports the collective whole. Community was developed through repeated smaller group to larger group interactions supported by individual reflection and researcher selected videos.

**Practice.** Implications for practice were not clear in the beginning. Participants to varying degrees alluded to implications for practice in their reflections and in group conversations stating that knowing each other better helps them fill communication gaps, which improves service to students. The greatest implications for practice came during shadow week. Shadow week was instituted to give participants permission to visit and learn about each other's work. During shadow week participants developed three to four questions that they would like their partner to focus on as they shared their knowledge. They met for one to two hours during this week and wrote an individual reflection about what they learned. Each participant thus experienced a first-hand view of their partner's work. As a result, they began to see how some of the dots connected within practice. All requested more future opportunities. Implications for practice became clearer as

participants developed a better understanding of self and their impact on colleagues work and the collective impact on student success.

**C4P Model.** In addition to Wenger's (1998) social learning theory and communities of practice (CoP), the community of practice elements of the peer-to-peer mentoring program were developed through lens of Hoadley and Kilner's (2007) C4P model. The C4P model consists of five primary components: purpose, content, conversations, connections and context. Purpose is potentially the most essential of the five elements. It encourages engagement and provides the foundation for the content and conversations that follow. The purpose or domain of this CoP was the capacity to exercise personal agency in one's own life and work. Content establishes the topics that will be discussed. The content of this CoP was driven by the individual development plan (IDP). Conversations involve the sharing of information amongst two or more persons and it bonds all the other elements. Conversations occurred weekly through dyad connections within participant pairs and weekly group dialogue meetings. Additionally, information was shared through emails and videos to supplement face-to-face interactions and to remain connected between sessions. Hoadley and Kilner note that without conversation, knowledge can only be shared. However, new knowledge cannot be generated. Connections support conversations and context through its inherent relationship building. This program capitalized on existing connections within the unit. The connections may have been strengthened by weekly peer-to-peer interactions, group dialogue, and personal reflections. Context establishes relevance. Expounding upon existing knowledge cannot occur without context (Hodgkinson-Williams, Sieborger, & Slay 2007). As the program coordinator, I repeatedly questioned participants during dialogue meetings about the impact of personal growth and team growth on student

success. Additionally, during individual reflection activities, participants grounded their conversations with partners in practice by identifying how their connections supported student engagement.

### **Other Findings to Guide Future Research**

In this section I discuss areas of the program and study that could reduce ambiguity, improve structure, and support the efficacy of future iterations of the program. I discuss how technology was not valued as a means for connection. While technology was not valued for primary connections, certain tools may support interpersonal connections and provide a hub for program tools. I discussed the potential improvements of the individual development plan (IDP) to support more immediate connections and reduce anxiety and discomfort. I explain how my field notes could be improved by using an observational protocol to support observations of research sites. Finally, I discussed the challenge presented resulting from not requiring a mentoring agreement.

### **Technology Not Necessary but Appropriate**

Use of technology as a way of meeting was not appreciated by this group. When offered, meeting via technology was not considered. Participants valued in-person group interaction over all other alternatives. Traditional in-person communication had greater impact on this group's sense of community and personal/professional development. As a result, scheduling group meetings after work was challenging. Only a few participants were willing to meet on weekends or at alternative locations. Family and personal time was valued by each participant. Therefore, weekend meetings and alternative locations were not an option for this group. Email was used extensively to communicate information to participants. Use of email to communicate information may have had an

impact of structural empowerment. I found email to be an efficient and appropriate medium to communicate. However, a companion tool such as Canvas, Facebook or other technological tool that supports social community development may have provided participants greater access to references, tools and program essential information.

### **Difficulties with the Individual Development Plan (IDP)**

The individual development plan (IDP) and reflections were much more difficult for participants to complete than I anticipated. It took at least three weeks for participants to gain their footing. The IDP questions were more uncomfortable for participants than I anticipated. I would revise this tool to be more culturally appreciative in future iterations of the study and program.

### **Observational Protocol**

My observational journals were adequate. However, the information could have been better organized. In future studies, I would develop some form of an observational protocol. Creswell (2015) describes an observational protocol as an organized means for the researcher to record field notes during observation of a research site. It is a tool to help researchers ensure they are collecting appropriate level of content from the site under observation. In this observational protocol, the researcher would include a chronology of the events, a detailed description of the site and participants, and verbatim quotations from the participants.

### **Mentoring Agreement**

In future iterations of this study and program, I would require all participants to complete the mentoring agreement during orientation. In this iteration of the study and program, the mentoring agreement was optional. During the program, a participant called



in sick and their partner was left unsure of how best to complete the weekly IDP activities. Had a mentoring agreement been in place, contingencies could have been discussed to mitigate such circumstances.

### **Transferability**

In this section, I discussed the sample size as relates to benefits and drawbacks and its appropriateness for this study. I also discuss the challenge I experienced early in the study with social desirability bias and the adjustments I made to address this challenge. Finally, I discuss the limited program time and its impact on the participants progression through the mentoring process.

### **Small Sample**

The sample size in this study was intentionally restricted to six participants. According to Creswell (2015), it is common for qualitative studies to have small sample sizes. Studies with small sample sizes can include a few individuals or a few cases. This is because the researcher's intent is to provide a detailed depiction of the site under investigation and its primary actors. The sampling in this study was limited to six participants from the research site so that I may gather in-depth responses that would support answering the three research questions. Sampling was also limited to allow adequate time for data analysis and report writing. Also, I considered inviting participants from another setting but relented due to the study and innovation being specific to the context at the joint military base. A larger sample may have yielded a later saturation point. Additionally, there would have been a greater opportunity to invite more male participants and participants of diverse backgrounds. However, with each new addition, the data may have become unmanageable and result in underdeveloped perspectives.

Additionally, collecting in-depth data and analyzing those data takes considerable time and effort on the part of the researcher (Creswell, 2015). According to Creswell a researcher might study a single individual or 30 or more individuals depending on the purpose of the study and research questions.

This study also required multiple group sessions and a focus group interview. A larger sample may have limited interactions during group dialogue sessions. From the lessons learned during the pilot study, I identified six participants as an optimal number. While two to four participants would have been too low, 10 or more participants may have reduced participants desire to share in a large group. I gained this understanding from the pilot study when one participant stated that if she had been asked to participate in a large group she would not have shared as much, if at all.

### **Social Desirability Bias**

I noted evidence of social desirability bias. Social desirability bias describes instances where participants are inclined to provide survey responses or offer answers in other research settings that might be viewed as acceptable. This may occur instances of anonymity and where participants are assured that there are no wrong answers (Mcraay, 2015). I noted this challenge early on and I built three additional qualitative data sources into the program to address this challenge. I shadow week to the program. In doing so, participants championed their peer in their weekly reflections and discussed challenges that they observed during these interactions. I also added an invitation to write a letter to the next cohort. This resulted in a few more authentic passages that revealed actual conflicts in practice that I captured during qualitative data analysis. Finally, I followed the focus group interview with an invitation to participants giving them an opportunity to

discuss the identified key themes from that interview. I invited participants to share in an individual reflection activity or a one-to-one interview. Four participants chose to complete an individual reflection activity and two participants chose to complete a one-to-one interview. Participants chose one of the three topics that meant the most to their feelings and perceptions about the program.

### **Limited Program Time**

Two months was just enough to work through the individual development plan (IDP) and one round of shadow week. Time was limited due to being restricted to after work during the week without the possibility of weekend meetings. As a result, as the program was gaining traction and the community of practice (CoP) was beginning to take shape, the program ended. Ideally, I would envision this program as a four- to six-month program where participants would be able to complete the IDP, participate in multiple rounds of work shadowing, and complete a small-scale project with partner that might improve practice.

### **Recommendations to Pierce College**

Participants in this study expressed several challenges with alienation during the first iteration of the study and following “shadow week” in the peer-to-peer mentoring program. During shadow week reflections and the focus group interview, the participants stated that they would like more opportunities to shadow other departments both within their specific student services group and in other areas of student affairs. Participants expressed a desire to be more connected to their student services network to help them make more immediate connections in practice as entry-level team members and to ultimately provide improved service to students.

Participants also shared a desire to connect more with administrators. Some participants stated that they would like to shadow administrators or be mentored by an administrator to learn more about what their work entails. Participants were also interested in the various career paths within student services to include administration. Some participants expressed that shadowing and getting connected to the various aspects of the career field may help them in affirming their career goals and making a plan for additional professional development and education with their supervisor.

Based upon these participant desires, I recommend that Pierce College's executive administrators and human resources department retool orientation and district integration activities to support new team members' connections to their complete employee success network. At a minimum, this network would include their specific team within student services at their primary campus and connection to the other campuses and sites where employees are doing similar work.

I would also recommend adopting synergistic staff supervision practices. According to Hull (2006), student affairs workers leave their institutions each year due to job dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction often stems from lack of orientation, socialization, and connection to high quality supervision. According to Hull (2006), synergistic staff supervision focuses on holistic development of entry-level student affairs team members that includes the following: intentional socialization in practice; formal and informal performance appraisal; consistent feedback on successes and areas of improvement; and continual professional development that incorporates current and future career aspirations. Developing these intentional behaviors in Pierce College District may reduce attrition rates, absenteeism, intentions to turnover, and behaviors associated with psychological withdrawal.

## **Conclusion and Future Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate peer-to-peer mentoring as an approach to leverage the unique worldviews of a multigenerational work unit to improve workplace connections, improve interactions with military affiliated students, and support ongoing initiatives within the larger college. I described our problem of practice as problem that required redefining the work environment such that employees may experience more meaningful connections within the workplace; a more well-defined employment path that incorporates employees' future professional aspirations; and more consistent constructive feedback from supervisors. I identified the historic command and control leadership approach as a wicked problem that is reducing empowerment in practice. Drawing from the learning gained from reviewing the literature around the problem, I identified peer-to-peer mentoring with group dialogue and reflection as an appropriate approach to improving workplace relations and developing a community of practice. The program was successful in laying the foundation for a community practice. However, in identifying the participants' values, I was able to reframe the wicked problem. How leadership is viewed is one factor. However, several factors related to familial, cultural and personal values have helped me reframed the problem more appropriately as an intersection between all these factors.

Additionally, I identified several internal and external conflicts in practice that may be contributing to a reduction in opportunities for a more empowered work unit. To address the internal and external conflicts revealed during the peer-to-peer mentoring program and leverage the values of the participants, I would refine the individual development plan (IDP) to be more culturally appreciative in the next iteration of the study and program. To accomplish this, I would include appreciative inquiry in my

review of the literature to deepen my understanding of how best to develop the IDP and related tools such that participants might reframe the questions in their own voice. I would also expand the program to four to six months to allow time for the peer-to-peer interactions to reach their full potential.

I identified how the aforementioned conflicts may create issues or perpetuate current issues in practice. Specifically, I have identified how self-preservation with a focus on coworker acceptance and supervisor approval may impact participants' commitment to practice and the collective focus on improvement. To address these concerns, I would research approaches to building practical wisdom into this practice as an approach to addressing participants' concerns over how much to give and when to let go. Finally, to address potentially disproportionate power dynamics, I would review literature that may support participants' learning around how to speak truth to power as it relates to having a stake in their professional growth and a more collective effort toward improving student success.

From a leader's perspective, I would also investigate synergistic staff supervision. According to Hull (2006), synergistic staff supervision is a holistic approach to supervision and staff development. The author notes that discussions between supervisor and his/her employee occur in mutually beneficial dyads and include the following: formal and informal performance reviews; discussion of long-term career goals; and discussion of personal attitudes. This approach may enhance the personal and professional development of the student affairs unit at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis – McChord such that empowerment may be derived from the open communications, trust building relationships, continuous supervisory appraisal and feedback, and explicit appreciation of the professional's career goals and aspirations.

Synergistic staff supervision is a leadership approach that is related to leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. Shi, Wang, and Zhang (2012) describe LMX as a *dyadic* exchange relationship between a leader and their employee. This dyadic relationships forms over time through a series of exchange processes. The first process includes *role taking*, which occur during initial connections. Second, *role making* occurs when the leader identifies expectations, the employee agrees to meet expectations, and the leader-member relationship is engaged in continual role negotiation. The final role is *role routinization*. Through completing this sequence of processes, the leader will form unique relationships specific to each of her/his employees. Shi et al. note that the results of the relationships may vary with the low end of the spectrum being a transactional relationship where the leader-member exchanges are based heavily on contract compliance. However, adding this research to the body of literature that guided this study is essential due to the positive impact of the synergistic staff supervision and LMX theory. The high end of the spectrum may result in leader-member relationships with a high-level of mutual trust, respect, and loyalty between the leader and the employee(s).

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APPENDIX A  
CONSENT FORM

## **Consent Form: Evaluation of Peer-to-peer Mentorship Program**

Dear Colleague,

My name is James Lett and I am a doctoral student in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College (MLFTC) at Arizona State University (ASU). I am working under the direction of Dr. Sherman Dorn, a faculty member in MLFTC. We are conducting a research study on professional development within the student services unit at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis McChord. We are inviting your participation in our study.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn how peer-to-peer mentoring shapes your work satisfaction and productivity. In this study, I will be seeking your feedback on the impact of a peer-to-peer mentorship program on your professional outlook in your current role and work activities as it relates to our student services unit at Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

### **Description of the Study**

We are asking for your help, which will involve your participation in a focus group interview, a brief survey before and after the mentorship program, and the collection of journal entries and other written material created during the mentorship program. The focus group interview, surveys, and journal entries will help us track participant knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and beliefs about how mentoring may shape cross-departmental communications, professional development, and fulfillment of institutional outcomes. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop participation at any time. If you choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty whatsoever. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. Additional details about the study are detailed in the passages below.

#### *Projected schedule and study activities*

This study will take place between January and June 2018, at the same time as the mentorship program. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to share the post-meeting written reflections and project work related to action items identified during mentorship program meetings.

#### *Focus group interview*

A focus group interview will be used to better understand your experiences and perceptions as they relate to participation in the study. We anticipate this interview will take 45-60 minutes. With your explicit consent, this interview will be audio recorded. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you can also change your mind after the interview starts. Simply, let me

know. If you consent to the focus group interview, your personal information will be confidential.

#### *Empowerment survey*

A short survey at the beginning and end of the mentorship program will also be used to gather additional data about your perceptions prior to the study and following the study. In each instance, the survey should take between 5 and 10 minutes. Your survey data will be de-identified in the findings of the final dissertation.

#### *One-to-one Interview*

We will invite participants to a 15-30 minute one-to-one interview or invite participants to write one final reflection based upon the key point(s) of emphasis revealed during the focus group interview. With your explicit consent, this interview will be audio recorded. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you can also change your mind after the interview starts. Simply, let me know. If you consent to the one-to-one interview, your personal information will be confidential.

### **How the Results will be used**

The results of this study will be used primarily to a dissertation. Other uses may include usage in presentations, in future publications, and in a report to Pierce College detailing how the results may support organizational improvement. However, your name and all other identifiable information will be excluded.

### **Confidentiality**

To maintain confidentiality of your contributions, all data will be password protected, and only James Lett and Dr. Sherman Dorn will have access to this information. Recordings will be transcribed immediately with identifiable information removed. The recordings will be erased immediately following transcription. Transcriptions, reflections, written observations, and researcher field notes will be stored on a password-protected computer. Only James Lett and Dr. Sherman Dorn will have access to those deidentified materials.

You will use a unique identifier, one that is easy for you to remember, but one which no one else will know. The unique identifier will be the first three letters of your mother's name and the last four digits of your phone number. For example, Mar0789, would represent the first three letters of Mary and 0789 are the last four digits of your phone number. As a result, your responses will be confidential. This identifier will be used to match your initial set of responses to your later responses. You will not be identified in any way. All files will be destroyed three years after the study has concluded.

### **Risks**



APPENDIX B

PEER-TO-PEER MENTORING PROGRAM MATERIALS



## Welcome Letter

Dear Mentors,

Welcome to the Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program. Thank you for being part of this program. I look forward to assisting you in making this experience as pleasant and rewarding as possible. In doing so, I have created this packet as a guide for your mentoring relationship. Included in this packet is an overview of the program as well as other information you may find useful.

My mission statement that underlies this program is: “Everything you need to be fulfilled is already within you. You have already achieved much through the application of your innate strengths and connection to your core values.” In addition, I have developed a philosophy that our services to students and achievement of our institutional mission is accomplished through our shared connections and experiences.

The Pierce College at JBLM P2P Mentoring Program Orientation will serve as a stepping-stone to a successful relationship. You will receive all program materials at this event. It is also important to note that any questions you may have can be answered at the Orientation as well as anytime thereafter by reaching out to me at [jdlett@asu.edu](mailto:jdlett@asu.edu) or at 253-576-9571. The Orientation is also a great time for each mentor to get acquainted and develop their negotiated agreement that will assist in setting goals for the program.

I look forward to exciting exchanges of dialogue and reflection!

Sincerely,

James D. Lett

ASU Doctoral Student and Pierce College at JBLM P2P Program Coordinator  
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College | Arizona State University

## **Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program Overview**

The Pierce College at Joint Base Lewis-McChord Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program (PCJBLM P2P) is a unique mentoring program pairing student services staff members seeking advancement within higher education and growth in their current role. Peer-to-peer mentoring supports developing a sense of community within the workgroup and provides participants with an opportunity to flesh out your strengths, weaknesses and innate talents. Additionally, through the development of an Individual Development Plan (IDP), participants will have a concrete tool to reflect upon and take back to your supervisors for additional professional development planning. Peer-to-peer mentors will select each other based on common professional interests.

P2P mentors are encouraged to meet informally and plan your interactions around your essential goals as well as the IDP. Peer-to-peer mentors serve as supporters, inquisitors, and innovators as you develop your unique relationship. P2P mentors offer questions around professional and personal goals that may guide your partner in defining themselves personally and professionally and help them develop a plan for future professional growth.

The PCJBLM P2P Mentoring Program is **NOT** an employment placement program. Rather, the PCJBLM P2P Mentoring Program may support building a nurturing peer-to-peer relationship to guide student services staff members towards becoming strengths-based and value-driven professionals. This program contributes to the student services staff member's development, as s/he may need assistance in dealing with the challenges that come with deciphering a career path within higher education.

I strongly recommend that each P2P mentoring pair negotiate an agreement outlining goals, time commitments, and an agenda for the remaining seven weeks of the program. For each meeting after the Orientation, P2P mentoring pairs should meet within their agreed upon agenda. The agreement guide is intended to create a dialog as P2P mentors develop a plan together. Please watch for correspondence from me. I will be conducting seven additional dialogue meetings for progress, questions, and to offer workshops that may support a more beneficial relationship between participants. I will also be conducting a focus group and one-to-one interviews to assess the impact of the program.

## **P2P Mentor and Program Coordinator Roles and Responsibilities**

### Peer-to-Peer Mentor:

- Will enter into the relationship for support with identified strengths, weaknesses, innate talents, and plan(s) for the future
- Will serve as confidant to partner
- Will foster sense of community in partner dyad and larger group
- Will be a great listener
- Will set high expectations for self and partner
- Will hold self and partner accountable
- Will agree that this relationship is not entered into to find a job
- Will be proactive and take ownership of the relationship
- Will set aside 1 to 2 hours per week to participate in the mentor program
- Will be open to personal and professional growth
- Will be willing to make tentative plans for the future
- Will take advantage of other's knowledge, experience, and expertise
- Will agree to a no-fault conclusion of mentor relationship
- Will be receptive to feedback and mentoring
- Will provide constructive feedback without judgement
- Will challenge self and partner
- Will respect partner and community
- Will listen, think, question, and strategize with the peer-to-peer partner
- Will always RSVP attendance to peer-to-peer partner
- Will always RSVP to program coordinator when required to attend dialogue sessions
- Will always complete journal reflections following each interaction
- Will fulfill responsibilities set forth in negotiated mentoring agreement
- Will maintain absolute confidentiality
- Will always participate with integrity

### PCJBLM P2P Mentoring Program Coordinator:

- Will administer an program based upon sound research and rationale
- Will provide a thorough orientation and background
- Will be transparent in data collection where appropriate
- Will be a teacher, guide, and/or group mentor when needed
- Will communicate effectively and consistently
- Will help participants negotiate meaning and understand the learning process
- Will give relevant and constructive feedback
- Will plan events and provide up-to-date timelines
- Will address problems immediately and allow for collective resolution
- Will welcome ideas and suggestions for improvement
- Will be brave and dare to fail
- Will always respects participants and their time

- Will always accept responsibility for success and failure
- Will always act with integrity

## **Other Discussion Topics (this is not an exhaustive or restrictive list)**

### Developing Relationships

- Set your mentoring goals together.
- Go out for dinner together
- Socialize with other mentors together
- Tour each other's current work
- Talk about your very first job
- Talk about planning a career
- Talk about living and working in unfulfilling environments.
- Talk about personal values.
- Talk about the future.

### General Career Topics

- Sit in on some seminars together or listen to webinars and live-streamed broadcasts
- Critically review each other's resumes
- Develop and deliver a pretend presentation or instructional situation.
- Talk about how you have acquired skills and abilities over time.
- Talk about when you first noticed your essential strengths.
- Talk about when you first identified your talent(s).
- Which is most important to you: being great at something, being good at most things, or being functional in all areas of your life and work
- Talk about your best performance at work or in any other environment (sports, game play, school).
- Talk about resources to improve in professionally and in career (including web-based)
- Talk about networking and developing social capital
- Talk about what it takes to continue being or start becoming your authentic self
- Which is most important: work/life balance or work/life integration
- Talk about office essential tasks that you enjoy, i.e. balancing an office budget, creating spreadsheets, creating presentations, answering questions, solving operational problems, creating a warm environment, etc.

### Specific Career Topics

- Why have I chosen education?
- Do I consider myself an educator?
- What is the purpose of higher education?
- What is the essential mission of community colleges?
- What does is meant by teaching and learning?
- What are the multiple ways I learn?
- Which is most important to me: career progression or career mastery.

### Topics related to developing a more culturally appreciative environment

- Talk about unconscious bias
- Talk about what it means to be culturally sensitive
- Develop individual definitions of the following three words: equity, diversity, and inclusion

Topics Related to improving student success at JBLM

- Develop individual definitions of student success
- What are the challenges to student success at JBLM?
- What are the opportunities?
- What can be done to improve student success at JBLM?
- What might be your role in that improvement?

## Negotiated Mentoring Agreement Overview

A negotiated agreement between peer-to-peer (P2P) mentors may help to reduce several potential problems or issues over expectations and goals for the program. At the Orientation, we will complete and review the negotiated mentoring agreement and roles and responsibilities of the mentoring pairs. Each participant member may return to this agreement to discern progress towards their goals and/or add goals where appropriate.

The following are suggested topics to be included in the negotiated agreement:

- Specific responsibilities of P2P mentors
- Explicit description of skills to be learned and practiced
- Types of activities that will provide this practice
- Agreements on time and frequency of meetings and feedback sessions
- Confidentiality parameters
- No-fault termination clause or discussion

### P2P Negotiated Mentoring Agreement

We are voluntarily entering into a mentoring relationship that we expect to benefit both members of the mentoring pair. We want this to be a rich, rewarding experience with most of our time together spent in substantive career/personal development activities. To minimize the administrative details, we have noted these features of our relationship.

Confidentiality

---

Frequency of meetings

---

Approximate amount of time to be invested by P2P Mentor1

---

Approximate amount of time to be invested by P2P Mentor2

---

Specific role of Mentor1

---

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Specific role of Mentor2

---

---

Specific Expectations of Mentor1

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Specific Expectations of Mentor2

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**Checklist**

- We have discussed confidentiality.
  - We have discussed the mentoring experience as further opportunity to develop our professional skills.
  - We have discussed our commitment to the program including our availability for meetings and activities.
  - We have discussed our roles and responsibilities to each other.
  - We have discussed (other topics listed above):
- 
- 
- 
- 

We have agreed to the following meeting times:

Date _____	Time _____
Date _____	Time _____
Date _____	Time _____
Date _____	Time _____
Date _____	Time _____
Date _____	Time _____
Date _____	Time _____
Date _____	Time _____



P2P Mentor 1 Signature and date

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P2P Mentor 1 Signature and date

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\*Adapted from Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring by Margo Murray.

## Personal Reflection Journal Guide

### What is Reflection?

Reflection is a process of thinking about our experiences and applying meaning to them. We naturally do this throughout our lives to support our learning and increase our understanding. Some may refer to this process as debriefing, circling, or after action or activity reporting. These terms, while correct, may oversimplify the importance and impact of conscious reflection (Leung, 2006).

### Why Should We Reflect?

Reflection is essential to our growth because we often by thinking about what we have done and why, rather than simply completing a task or activity. We often want to connect our experience(s) to our lives and explore issues or concepts in a wider context (Leung, 2006).

### The 4 C's of Reflection

Four important elements of reflection are isolated in this model in order to develop effective strategies. Effective critical reflection is continuous, connected, challenging and contextualized (Leung, 2006).

- **Continuous:**  
Most effective reflection activities occur both during the course of someone's education and service. Continuous reflection should occur before, during and after each learning experience.
- **Connected:**  
Bridging the gap between classroom theories and personal/professional learning experiences to the "big picture" context in order to understand the causes and potential solutions to social issues.
- **Challenging:**  
Provoking deep critical thinking in order to develop alternate explanations and question their initial perception and observations. Creating a safe environment that promotes trust, mutual respect, and open dialogue is crucial.
- **Contextualized:**  
The reflection activity is appropriate and purposefully implemented according to the topic, experience, and content (Leung, 2006).

### Reflection Activity for JBLM P2P Mentoring Program

#### I. What (Happened)?

Describe what happened objectively in details about facts and event(s) without judgment or interpretation. It is important to spend time with this question, to talk about concrete particulars and not go right to the next question (Leung, 2006).

*Example Questions:*

- What happened?
- What did you observe?
- What issue is being addressed?

- What were the results of the interaction?
- What events or “critical incidents” occurred?
- What was of particular notice?

## **II. So What (Does it mean to you)?**

Discuss your feelings, ideas, and analysis of the learning experience.

*Example Questions:*

- Did you learn a new skill or clarify an interest?
- Did you hear, smell, or feel anything that surprised you?
- What feelings or thoughts seem most strong today?
- How was your experience different from what you expected?
- What struck you about that? How was that significant?
- What impacts the way you view the situation/experience?
- What lens are you viewing it from?
- What do the critical incidents mean to you? How did you respond to them?
- What did you like/dislike about the experience?
- Did the interaction empower you to become more self-sufficient, self-reliant, or self-assured?
- What did you learn or discover about P2P mentor?
- In what ways did you work well together?
- What does that suggest to you about the pairing?

## **III. Now What (Are You Going to Do)?**

Consider broader implications of the learning experience and apply learning. Be aware to strike a balance between realistic, reachable goals and openness to spontaneity and change.

*Example question:*

- What seems to be the root causes of the issue/problem addressed?
- What learning occurred for you in this experience? How can you apply this learning?
- What would you like to learn more about, related to this subject or issue?
- What follow-up is needed to address any challenges or difficulties?
- What information are you willing to share with your peers?
- How would you improve your interactions with your P2P partner? How might your P2P partner improve their interactions with you?
- If you could have the conversation again, how would you interact differently? What would complete the conversation?
- What are your pros and cons of leaving some discussion threads open for further dialogue?

Leung, Karen. 2006. Cal Corps Public Service Center. Retrieved from:

[http://www.cedmcgill.com/sites/cedmcgill.com/files/resources/files/cal\\_corps\\_reflection\\_guide.pdf](http://www.cedmcgill.com/sites/cedmcgill.com/files/resources/files/cal_corps_reflection_guide.pdf).

## Individual Development Plan (IDP)

(To be completed with your peer-to-peer partner through dialogue and reflection)

### Define yourself

1. Who am I?
2. Why am I the person that I am?
3. What do I value? (be specific and exhaustive)
4. Why are these values important to me?
5. Does my current work or role align with my values?
6. If not, does that impact my performance and my growth?
7. What can I do to be my most authentic self in life and work?

### Identify Your Strengths

1. What are my strengths?
2. What strengths have been with me over my lifetime?
3. How do I know they are my strengths?
4. When did I first notice my strengths?
5. How can I build upon these strengths?
6. Does my current work or role limit the development of my strengths?

### Identify Your Weaknesses

1. What are my weaknesses?
2. What have I struggled with over my lifetime?
3. How do I know they are weaknesses?
4. Does my current role allow space for developing my areas of weakness?
5. Does my current supervisor open brave spaces for me to challenge my weaknesses?
6. If made available, am I willing to move into these spaces? Why or Why not?

### Identify Your Talent

1. What are my talents?
2. What makes me smile or gives me fulfillment without effort?
3. What are the things I do without thinking?
4. Of these things, which of them have I been doing over my lifetime?

### Identify Your Career and/or Life Goal

1. What position/role/life circumstance would be the most fulfilling?
2. Have I reached that goal?
3. What, if anything, is holding me back?
4. What strengths and/or talents can I depend on if I were in this position/role/life circumstance right now?
5. How can I draw upon these strengths and/or talents now to reach that position/role/life circumstance?

### Identify a Stretch Assignment or Special Project

Name a stretch assignment or special project that may highlight your values, strengths, and talents. It is okay if this stretch assignment or special project may not align with your current or future career aspirations. (Be specific and be detailed. Write it down.)

### **What's Your Plan of Action?**

You have defined yourself in general. You have defined yourself further by identifying your strengths, weaknesses, and talents. You have also identified a career and/or life goal. Finally, you have identified a stretch assignment or special project that may highlight your unique values, strengths, and talents.

1. What have you learned through this process that you will take back to your supervisor? (Be specific and detailed. Write it down.)
2. How will you follow through on your stretch assignment or project? (Be specific and detailed. Write it down.)
3. As a result of completing this work, how will you approach your current work and future roles or positions? (Be specific and detailed. Write it down.)

CONDITIONS OF WORKPLACE EFFECTIVENESS QUESTIONNAIRE II

<b>Conditions for Work Effectiveness Questionnaire-II</b>				
Below please write your unique identifier: the first three letters of your mother's name and the last three digits of your phone number. For example, Mar789, would represent the first three letters of Mary and 789 are the last three digits of your phone number. As a result, your responses will be anonymous while still allowing matching of your survey responses at the beginning and end of the mentorship program.				
Your unique identifier				
<b>How much of each kind of opportunity do you have in your present job?</b>				
	1 = none	2	3 = Some	4 5 = A lot
1. Challenging work	1	2	3 4	5
2. The chance to gain new skills and knowledge on the job	1	2	3 4	5
3. Tasks that use all of your own skills and knowledge	1	2	3 4	5
<b>How much access to information do you have in your present job?</b>				
	1 = none	2	3 = Some	4 5 = A lot
1. The current state of Pierce College at JBLM	1	2	3 4	5
2. The values of institutional leadership	1	2	3 4	5
3. The goals of institutional leadership	1	2	3 4	5
<b>How much access to support do you have in your present job?</b>				
	1 = none	2	3 = Some	4 5 = A lot
1. Specific information about things you do well	1	2	3 4	5
2. Specific comments about things you could improve	1	2	3 4	5
3. Helpful hints or problem solving advice	1	2	3 4	5
<b>How much access to resources do you have in your present job?</b>				
	1 = none	2	3 = Some	4 5 = A lot
1. Time available to do necessary job-related tasks	1	2	3 4	5
2. Time available to accomplish job requirements	1	2	3 4	5
3. Acquiring temporary help when needed	1	2	3 4	5
<b>In my work setting/job: (JAS)</b>				
	1 = none	2	3 = Some	4 5 = A lot
1. the rewards for innovation on the job are	1	2	3 4	5
2. the amount of flexibility in my job is	1	2	3 4	5

3. the amount of visibility of my work-related activities within the institution is	1	2	3	4	5
<b>How much opportunity do you have for these activities in your present job: (ORS)</b>	1 = none	2	3 = Some	4	5 = A lot
1. Collaborating on student care with leaders	1	2	3	4	5
2. Being sought out by peers for help with problems	1	2	3	4	5
3. Being sought out by leaders for help with problems	1	2	3	4	5
4. Seeking out ideas from professionals other than unit-level leadership and peers e.g., colleagues in other departments	1	2	3	4	5
<b>GLOBAL EMPOWERMENT</b>					
<b>How much of each kind of opportunity do you have in your present job?</b>	1 = Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 = Strongly Agree
1. Overall, my current work environment empowers me to accomplish my work in an effective manner	1	2	3	4	5
2. Overall, I consider my workplace to be an empowering environment	1	2	3	4	5

This survey was adapted from Conditions of Workplace Effectiveness Questionnaire II (CWEQ-II)

#### Reference

Laschinger, H.K.S., Finegan, J., Shamian, J., & Wilk, P. (2001). Impact of structural and psychological empowerment on job strain in nursing work settings: Expanding Kanter's model. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 31(5), 260-272.



APPENDIX D  
LEADERS GUIDE

## **Pierce College at JBLM Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program**

### **Instruction Guide for JBLM Supervisors, Deans, and Executive Director**

Thank you for supporting your staff member in participating in the Pierce College at JBLM Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program. This guide is to support you in understanding the essential tenets of the program and gain your further support for future iterations of a research study. Leaders are critical to the success of a mentoring relationship. Without your support, the potential positive impact of P2P mentoring model may not be fully realized. As leaders, you may also provide insight into developmental goals to the pairings and support the continued growth of your team members following the program. With this guide, my goal is to support your understanding and to provide you with a copy of the materials that your team members will be using to complete the program.

Specifically, I have included in this guide:

- A brief discussion of the development of the program;
- Research background;
- Goals of the program;
- Time commitments from mentoring pairs;
- Potential benefits to peer-to-peer mentoring;
- Potential challenges to peer-to-peer mentoring;
- Potential benefits to the supervisor; and
- The role of the supervisor during the program

### **Brief Discussion of the Development of the Program**

This program is a result of an action research study that is in its fourth iteration and spans more than two years of investigation in context. **Action research** or research in context is practitioner inquiry where the researcher seeks to improve the quality of an organization and its performance. In general, it is a cyclical and systematic inquiry of practice where practitioners gather and analyze data and develop innovations to address problems of practice.

In this action research project, peer-to-peer mentoring is being evaluated to determine its effectiveness in addressing the following problem of practice: How do we transition from a traditional hierarchal system to create a more empowering work structure that offers opportunities for collaborative problem formulation and resolution?

From a national perspective, leaders within higher education are being asked to develop continuous iterations of right action; provide more collaborative professional development; and cultivate a more reflective practice in the face of the most culturally and generationally dynamic workforce in our nation's history. Further, professional development is essential to solidifying student affairs as a profession and meeting the demands of today's educational environment.

For community colleges, there is an increased focus on demonstrating excellence and aligning professional development of staff with institutional outcomes. However, much of the professional development of staff has been housed in tacit knowledge. This

uncodified knowledge is often exchanged informally with colleagues working together consistently. For educators, mentoring has been seen as the most effective way to exchange this knowledge and support their development as higher education professionals.

### **Research Background**

The Pierce College at JBLM P2P Mentoring Program is being evaluated as part a research study to address the following research questions:

#### ***Research Questions being Assessed***

- *RQ1: Wicked problems* – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program encourage a transition from an environment of predetermined problems and solutions by management to a collaborative culture of inquiry and problem resolution?
- *RQ2: Engagement/empowerment* – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, how does participation in a peer-mentoring program support the redistribution of power dynamics within student services?
- *RQ3: Communities of practice* – In a student-services unit in a community college on a joint military base, where and when does participation in a peer-mentoring program engender greater mutual support of colleagues and understanding of team roles, and encourage sharing of workplace artifacts that might improve practice?

#### ***Theoretical Perspectives and Research Guiding the Project***

##### *Wicked Problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973)*

Application – Redesigning a unit where previous behaviors were impacted by high command and control such that entry-level staff are passive participants in unit-level engagements.

##### *Theory of Structural Empowerment (Kanter, 1977)*

Application – Leveling hierarchy is an essential element to raising the consciousness and contribution level of entry-level staff. It may also support advancing unit-level supervisors to be more strategic in addressing environmental challenges impacting workplace effectiveness.

##### *Theory of Psychological Empowerment (Zimmerman, 1990)*

Application - Contextually-based phenomenon that grapples with the fit between individual and environment. It includes several key factors, such as collective action, skill development, and cultural awareness.

##### *Social Learning Theory and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998)*

Application (domain, community, practice) - First, people are social beings. Second, acquisition of knowledge builds competence as it relates to the situated context. Third, knowing involves participation in shared enterprises. Participation in these joint enterprises occurs when participants are actively engaged in the shared domain and

accountable to each other. Finally, such social learning may help people develop meaning with respect to the world and their engagement within it.

### **Goals of the Program**

- To assess the effectiveness of peer-to-peer mentoring as instrument to improve practice.
- To provide participants with a comprehensive Individual Development Plan (IDP) that fleshes out their values, strengths, weaknesses, and innate talents.
- Using the IDP as a catalyst, support participants in developing rich dialogue around their development with their supervisors.
- Provide participants with an opportunity to develop communal relationships by supporting them with small group and larger group conversations followed by individual reflection.
- Provide participants with opportunity to develop a community of practice through development of relationships, engagement in social learning, and identification of a shared passion or concern for improvement.

### **Time Commitments for Mentoring Pairs**

The time commitment for the program is eight weeks of dialogue and reflection in participant pairs, group dialogue meetings, and development of other artifacts essential to the study and program. Participants will be asked to contribute one to two hours per week with their partner, two hours at the initial orientation, and one hour per meeting for the remaining seven group meetings. The reflective activities will be on an individual basis. Therefore, the exact time commitment cannot be determined.

### **Potential Benefits of Peer-to-Peer Mentoring**

- Supports more immediate responsiveness to daily operational issues.
- One way to address disproportionate power dynamics between employee and supervisor.
- Supports more natural relationship with colleagues.
- Supports strengthened interpersonal skills and improved flow of information may support operational effectiveness.
- Mentored employees have shown greater professional commitment, increased engagement and improved promotion potential.

### **Potential Challenges to Peer-to-Peer Mentoring**

- Formal and/or informal mentoring programs are contingent upon participation and free flow of information (some participants may not be willing to share what they know).
- Tacit knowledge is difficult to capture and share (leaders must encourage employees to be willing sharers of knowledge).

### **Potential Benefits to the Supervisor**

- Increased leadership perspective at entry-level staff positions
- Reduced decision-making time

- Increased trust in the individual and collective knowledge, skills, and abilities of team members
- Better understanding of staff capabilities when considering internal hires
- More reflection and innovation in practice
- Reduced instances of turnover and job dissatisfaction
- Reduced absenteeism
- Reduced operational oversight, allows more time for supervisors to participate in strategic spaces

### **The Role of the Supervisor During the Program**

The role of the supervisor during the program is to be patient with your team members and be a learner. As they desire to share their experiences, be present and appreciative. Supervisors may encourage their team members to bring all professional development with them to support rich dialogue and reflection. The revelations in the IDP may be personal and team members may not be willing to share all responses. Respect their privacy and encourage them to share any major discoveries, challenges, or opportunities revealed in the program at their own discretion. Attempt to fold in their professional aspirations into their comprehensive Employee Learning and Development (ELAD) plan.

APPENDIX E  
MEMBER CHECKING DOCUMENT

Dear colleague,

Thank you for participating the Pierce College at JBLM Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program this past spring. Also, I want to convey my deepest gratitude for your contributions to the research study evaluating the program. I learned a great deal from you and I want to share what I have learned from you in the passages that follow.

Please read through each passage and let me know how well I have represented you and your fellow peer mentors in my assessment and interpretations. If I have failed to represent your views adequately, please provide feedback to my dissertation chair, Dr. Sherman Dorn, at [Sherman.dorn@asu.edu](mailto:Sherman.dorn@asu.edu).

<b>Categories, Themes and Theme-related Components</b>	<b>Assertions</b>
<p><i>Category: Self-Efficacy as a domain</i>  <i>Theme: Understanding and appreciating self</i>  <i>Representative statements:</i>            Several participants were not sure of how they viewed or appreciated their capabilities at the beginning of the program. While they may have had some inclination about their capabilities, they had not given them much thought or fully appreciated them due to cultural/familial influences and personal views of self-identity.</p> <p>Through the use of the individual development plan, dyad discussions, and group discussions, some participants came to affirm what they initially thought of themselves, while others came to appreciate seeing themselves in a different light for the first time.</p>	<p>Self-efficacy was the domain due to its attributes being identified as essential to participants' meaning-making, professional development and connection to practice.</p>
<p><i>Category: Community</i>  <i>Theme: Understanding and appreciating colleagues</i>  <i>Representative statements:</i></p>	<p>Participants welcomed the opportunity to connect with each other as people and learn more about themselves through the eyes of their colleagues.</p>

<p>All participants came to recognize similarities in viewpoints, hobbies, current interests while appreciating differences in ages, experiences, and future aspirations.</p> <p>Participants recognized the value of building intentional trust relationships and the impact it may have on their individual development, team development and operational function in practice, and overall student success.</p>	
<p><i>Category: Community</i>  <i>Theme: Permission to speak freely without judgment or consequence</i>  <i>Representative comments:</i>  Participation in the program caused some participants to review some of their personal relationships and their roles and identifies within those other spaces. While the intent of the program was not to disrupt participants in this way, the nature of the questions and overall program gave participants the permission to investigate these circumstances while providing a safe space and a confidante that allowed them to develop comfort with sharing and reflecting.</p> <p>From these interactions, some participants devised plans for their professional development in pursuit of a career goal. Other participants became more solidified in their current role and current level of career progression. Their plans were on a more personal level as they seek more courage in appreciating themselves amid familial and/or cultural demands.</p>	<p>Despite discomfort, participants demonstrated courage and came to appreciate the opportunity to discuss their personal and professional development and create a plan for goal attainment with an accountability partner and a dialogue group to support and motivate them.</p>
<p><i>Category: Practice</i>  <i>Theme: Understanding self and colleagues supports trust in practice; trust in practice supports student success</i>  <i>Representative statements:</i>  Participants welcomed the opportunity to meet after work and during lunch breaks to share more about who they are as people and share how they contribute to the collective mission of student success.</p>	<p>Through weekly interactions and reflections, participants were better able to connect with their essential strengths and talents and identify how they might be instrumental in improving workplace relationships and the student experience.</p>



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Throughout the program, the participants recognized how their talents and strengths and the talents and strengths of their colleagues may fill communication gaps, support continued professional development, and create more synergy in the delivery of daily student services.

Participants also came to view their colleagues through a more appreciative and trustful lens. They all had an opportunity to see first-hand what their colleagues work looks like and what they potentially endure on a daily basis in delivering services to students.

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After reading the following passages, please answer the following questions:

1. Did I represent your feelings, thoughts, and perceptions adequately?
2. If not, what have I have misrepresented?
3. What is the correction?
4. What, if anything, did I leave out of my interpretation of your feelings, thoughts, and perceptions?
5. What should be added?
6. Do you any additional notes that you would like to share about your experience as it relates to the program and research study?

Please send all responses to my dissertation chair, Dr. Sherman Dorn, at

[Sherman.dorn@asu.edu](mailto:Sherman.dorn@asu.edu). Please use the following subject line in your email:

- Member Checking – Lett, James

APPENDIX F  
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### **Focus Group Interview:**

Two months ago, we identified some challenges within our Student Services Unit. I identified peer-to-peer mentoring as an appropriate response based upon your professional concerns and growth needs. From this focus group interview, I hope to gain from you a sense of how our time together has supported addressing these challenges and your professional concerns and growth needs.

1. Describe your experience with orientation.
  - a. *Probe: constructing our time together*
2. Describe your experiences with peer-to-peer mentoring.
  - a. *Probe: Developing personal mission statement*
  - b. *Probe: Discussing strengths and abilities*
  - c. *Probe: Learning from/about each other*
  - d. *Probe: Developing your IDP*
3. Describe your experience with videos and group dialogue.
  - a. *Probe: Interactions with larger group*
  - b. *Probe: Interactions with facilitator*
4. Describe your takeaways from these interactions.
  - a. *Probe: Where can pieces of this process support your work?*
  - b. *Probe: How did these interactions impact your relationships with your team members?*
  - c. *Probe: What is one overarching aspect of this process that you will take back with you?*

APPENDIX G

POST-FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW/REFLECTION ACTIVITY

## **Post-Focus Group Reflection/One-to-one Interview Questions**

During the focus group interview, we discussed several topics. The points of emphasis from the group interview included the following topics:

- Understanding and appreciation of self
- Understanding and appreciation of colleagues
- Permission to speak freely without judgment or consequence

Please pick ONE of the topics listed above and answer the following questions:

1. Which topic did you pick?
2. Please describe the impact of this topic, and changes over the mentorship program, as it affects your professional role in your department.
3. Please describe the impact of this topic, and changes over the mentorship program, as it affects student success.