Rebuilding Trust in Community Colleges Through Leadership, Emotional Healing, and Participatory Governance

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Numerous studies have been conducted examining leadership within community colleges, participatory governance and its role, as well as conditions that support organizational change. However, no analysis has been completed documenting the rebuilding of trust within a community college after a trauma is experienced on an institutional level. Broken hearts and broken trust are not just consequences of infidelity; these characteristics are often seen amongst faculty and long-time staff of community colleges where trust has been broken and institutional instability incurred. This article reviews and compares the emotional recovery process from infidelity to rebuilding trust within community colleges, specifically identifying steps for recovery, and highlighting key activities that can begin the healing and rebuilding of trust.

Rage, powerlessness, betrayal, and abandonment are emotions associated with victims of infidelity and trauma. However, these emotions are also observed in community college faculty and staff members in instances where trust is broken (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1394). Robbins and Judge (2010), define trust as a psychological state that exists when you agree to make yourself vulnerable to another because you have positive expectations about your current and future experiences (p. 395). Trust is the underlying foundation in any relationship, whether with spouses, coworkers, or institutional leaders; the breaking of this trust has serious adverse consequences (Robbins & Judge, 2010, p. 395). "Many clinicians have noted the similarities between responses to the discovery of infidelity and responses to trauma in general," including the emotional response and recovery process (Gordon et

al., 2005, p. 1394). Ordeals such as broken trust, fiscal mismanagement, and abuse of power are some examples of trauma incurred by community colleges. When employees assess that their organization has acted in bad faith, they rarely forgive—and never forget (Galford & Drapeau, 2003, p. 90). Tenured faculty and long-term staff of community colleges often feel married to their institution, finding emotional connections to the successes and failures of the institution. When trust is broken in relationships through infidelity or a breakdown in communication, victims often feel an "Overwhelming array of emotions such as fear, hurt, anger, numbness, or disbelief. As a result, the interactions between the partners are often chaotic, intensely negative, and likely to lead to frustration and anger rather than a sense of resolution" (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1395).

Numerous articles have been written examining leadership within community colleges, participatory governance and its role, as well as climates for change within these institutions. However, no analysis has been completed documenting the rebuilding of trust within a community college after an incident is experienced on an institutional level. This article will review and compare the emotional recovery process from infidelity to rebuilding trust in community colleges. This article will conclude by identifying steps in which a community college can engage to rebuild trust.

Infidelity and Trauma: The Effects on an Individual and an Institution

Many community colleges around the country have experienced distresses, from fiscal mismanagement to administrator scandals (Gardner, 2013). The true victims of these infidelities are the faculty, staff, and remaining administrators who are left to pick up the pieces and rebuild their institutions amidst feelings of hurt, mistrust, and embarrassment. Many institutions around the country, including top institutions such as Harvard, have felt beleaguered due to administrator misconduct and broken trust (Gardner, 2013). A common recourse is that these administrators exit the institution quickly, leaving behind an array of emotions and crumbled infrastructures that must now be rebuilt. The first step to understanding how to rebuild a community college from within begins with defining the type of trust that has been broken.

Galford & Drapeau (2003) identify three types of trust that exist within an organization. The first is *strategic trust*; this is the trust that employees have in upper management to make the right strategic decisions for the institution, including creating and sharing a unified vision for the institution (p. 90). The second type of institutional trust is *personal trust*; this is the trust that employees place in their direct managers, including the expectation of being treated fairly and considering employee needs when making critical decisions (p. 90). The third type of trust is *organizational trust*; this is trust placed in the organization as a whole, including internal processes being fair and the company following through with promises to stakeholders (p. 90). Although these three types of trust are distinct,

they are all interconnected and affect the overall trust within the organization (Galford & Drapeau, 2003, p. 90). Once the types of trust have been identified and examined, rebuilding trust can begin by taking time to understand how the faculty, staff, and remaining administrators feel within the organization.

Gordon, Baucom, and Snyder (2005) discussed the recovery process from trauma in three phases: (a) impact phase, (b) applying meaning phase, and (c) moving forward phase (pp. 1394–1395). Often, new administrators enter into a community college and begin trying to make changes and rebuild trust, thereby moving straight to phase three, or the moving forward phase, without examining the existing conditions or the types of trust that have been violated (Kearney, 2013, p. 913). These administrators are met with backlash, anger, and isolation from the institution's faculty and staff. New administrators entering into a college atmosphere where recovery is necessary must adhere to all three stages of the recovery process. Once the three steps are processed, then trust can begin to be rebuilt and change can occur. (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2005, p. 1396). Phase one: the impact phase is described as a time when the victims—in this case faculty, staff, and remaining administrators—must be allowed time to absorb and process their experiences from the interpersonal distress experienced (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1395). This is the time when individuals are trying to comprehend what has transpired, and often the injured person or persons retreat and establish barriers to protect themselves. This withdrawal can often serve as an attempt to rebuild power and create demands on the partner, or other party involved, to compensate for what has occurred (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1395). Behaviors consistent with the interpersonal response to trauma may include community college faculty withdrawing from engaging in participatory governance due to broken trust and disappointment. Also, personal responses to experiences of mistrust can cause faculty and staff to create new and unrealistic goals, which are projected onto the remaining administrators as a coping mechanism for previous betrayals within the institution.

Phase two: the applying meaning phase is a time in the recovery process when more in-depth explanations are pursued to create context and explain why the traumatic events occurred (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1395). This understanding is not intended to create blame, but to allow parties to take responsibility for roles they played within the relationship (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1395). This phase can be compared to community colleges that experience jaded/cynical faculty and staff. These faculty and staff members have concluded that they played a role that was either unappreciated or involved and then disregarded in the participatory governance model. Allowing for this phase can also enable individuals to mourn what they no longer have within their relationship. In the case of the community colleges, many faculty and staff members mourn for what the institution was but no longer is. Administrators who are not taking time to have employees experience phase two can experience faculty and staff members clinging to the past and an institution, idea, or relationship that no longer exists. Developing a shared view of what has occurred can create a sense of safety needed to "move on" and can "Contribute to the development of new expectancies or predictions for the

future; without understanding why an event occurred, it is difficult to predict whether it will recur in the future" (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1395).

Phase three: the moving forward phase empowers the victims to move forward with their lives within the context of a new set of relationship beliefs (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1396). More direct discussions of forgiveness can occur that were not possible in phases one and two due to the hurt and anger experienced by victims (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1396). This is important for administrators to note as attempting to engage in discussions of forgiveness before phases one and two are complete can be met with resistance. Forgiveness does not begin on day one of a new administrator's tenure; it begins once the administrator has created rapport with all individuals and constituency groups, engaging in the process with all staff members through phases one and two. Gordon et al. (2005) state that forgiveness does not require reconciliation or that anger disappear completely,; forgiveness only requires that a victim release the anger and hurt and make a conscious choice to step forward (p. 1396). At the end of phase three, the injured partner or victim must have achieved three goals in order to begin to move forward within the relationship, either together or individually: "(a) develop a realistic and balanced view of the relationship, (b) experience a release from being controlled by negative affect toward the offending partner, and (c) relinquish voluntarily his or her right to punish the participating partner" (Gordon et al., 2005, p. 1396). For faculty and staff who are expected to remain and rebuild a community college, the focus is to begin moving to forgiveness. All remaining employees should be allowed the opportunity to mourn what the institution was, move through the phases and provide the new executive team a chance to walk through the process with faculty and staff. Also, the executive team should be allowed the opportunity to prove themselves without demonizing them based on past hurts. Most importantly, the focus should remain on building a future rather than holding on to the past and refusing to move forward. The steps to mending a broken heart and broken trust begin with the three phases to reach a point where forgiveness is possible, acknowledging past experiences to begin the healing process.

Transforming Pain into Progress: College Leaders and Their Role as 'Sensemakers'

A range of emotions is experienced on a personal level when trust is broken within a community college. With the entrance of a new president, shifts in organizational leadership and culture, emotions can further intensify. New leaders entering into a community college in recovery can expect staff to react with "A host of concerns . . . about the security of their jobs, the degree of structural changes they will experience, and the capacity of the institution to absorb the changes and move forward successfully" (Kearney, 2013, p. 901). Galford & Drapeau (2003) recommend that administrators tasked with rebuilding trust follow four steps: Determine what happened, analyzing how trust was broken, how to prevent the deterioration of trust in the future, and identify if there were single or

multiple causes for the broken trust. Ascertain the depth and breadth of the loss of trust, assessing the impact on all shareholders. Be honest and address the situation quickly with candor and sincerity. Identify as precisely as possible what the organization must do to rebuild trust, including changes which are necessary, and sharing of information (pp. 94–95). New and remaining leaders within the organization should follow these steps and perform an in-depth analysis of the existing situation *before* engaging the faculty and staff in rebuilding trust.

Kearney (2013) performed a study within a community college experiencing a shift in leadership. The researcher observed and polled employees from the time their current president announced retirement to when a new president entered into the organization. Kearney (2013) identified a "hot zone" described as "An intense and high volume of negative emotions which began shortly after the announcement of the former president's resignation and ended when the new president's name (or the finalists) was announced" (p. 907). Kearney (2013) found that several respondents attributed "Much of their anxiety, apprehension, or other negative emotional reactions to the commitment they felt to the college and their feelings that the institution was vulnerable to the uncertainties or to the whims of a new administration" (p. 908). It is clear from this research that in addition to the emotional recovery process from the experienced distress of broken trust, community college faculty and staff also feel emotional turmoil when new leaders enter the organization, further exacerbating the trust rebuilding process. The feelings of "loss of influence or control" further contributed to the very emotional environment of a community college in transition (Kearny, 2013, p. 909). Kearney (2013) stated, "Based on the number of grief-related emotions reported during this time period, it appeared that people were perhaps grieving their loss of control and understanding of their environment, rather than of the presidential change itself" (p. 909). Essentially this "hot zone" ended once a new president was announced and individuals could move forward "with making sense of what their new environment would bring" (Kearney, 2013, p. 909).

Following the "hot zone," another theme was identified associated with the actions of the new leader. "The actions reported as having the greatest impact emerged in two major themes: (a) visibility and accessibility actions and (b) immediate problem resolution actions" (Kearney, 2013, p. 910). It was during this time that sensemaking began to occur by constituencies within the organization. Eddy (2003) found the actions of a new president influenced how the employees would make sense of change. The researcher identified that:

During periods of uncertainty, sensemaking occurs after an event rather than during the time of change. Thus, the creation of reality retroactively affords the college president additional time to consider how to frame change. Acting as "sensegivers," leaders shape the ultimate interpretation of change by campus members (Eddy, 2003, p. 456).

In approaching their new tenure with "sensemaking" in mind, presidents and administrators can facilitate positive change within their community college. Kearney (2013) discussed open forums hosted by the new president, supporting

visibility and accessibility. At these forums, the president asked three questions to engage with employees, "(a) What is working well at the College? (b) What is not working at the college? And "(c) What are your thoughts and dreams for the future?" (p. 910). By engaging the faculty and staff and opening communication channels the new president was able to be visible, accessible, and begin the trust building process. The president also addressed the immediate and pressing concerns helping to rebuild some trust within the institution and differentiate the new president from the past administration. Further, asking for feedback about the dreams and future of the college redirected current negative energy towards the possibility of a better tomorrow for the institution as a whole; this redirection of energy laid the foundation for staff to begin letting go of the past and imagining the possibilities for the future.

Within these scenarios of broken trust, the new president and administrators take on the role of therapist within the broken relationship, making sense out of the experiences and guiding all parties to forgiveness and moving forward. Scheinkman (2005) discussed working with infidelity, requiring the therapist to approach the situation with an "open mind" and "flexible stance." The therapist can give broad framework from which to explore the meaning of the incident, while dealing with ambiguity, and recognizing all the different perspectives, which must be fully recognized and understood. By leading with empathy, the therapist can have a powerful impact on the relationship and is essential in providing hope to the couple that they will be able to overcome and move forward (p. 243). In creating a constructive and safe process for reflection and decision-making, the therapist can promote negotiations and mutual accommodations to encourage both parties in the rebuilding of trust (pp. 243–244). Administrators must be aware of the role they play within an organization in recovery. By adopting the role of "therapist" or "sensemaker" the administrator can create a safe environment where communication can be reestablished and trust can be rebuilt.

Reina and Reina (2011) discuss rebuilding trust within the workplace requires leaders to "observe and acknowledge what has happened," recognizing the loss of what was and what could have been. Providing safe forums for focus groups, team meetings and one-on-one conversations can ensure employees are allowed to grieve and do not suppress their feelings. By providing support and receiving support, administrators can lead the charge to rebuilding trust. In alignment with the "therapist role" an administrator must adopt, reframing the experience and placing it into a larger context can encourage faculty and staff to see the bigger picture with the opportunities available to them. Most importantly, community college leaders must help their constituencies to let go and move on. There is a difference between remembering versus clinging to the past, employees may not forget what happened, but they can choose to look forward rather than dwell on the past (Reina & Reina, 2011, p. 12). If administrators are able to adopt this "sensemaker" role and demonstrate characteristics such as excellence, the ability to navigate ambiguity, collaborative decision-making, a strong ethical code, respect for others, and patience, they can begin to rebuild trust within their organizations (Wheelan, 2012). It is creating this new vision and working

towards a united goal, student success, which will allow a college president or administrator to succeed in the role of therapist.

Difficult Conversations & Mistrust: Honesty Is the Best Policy for Administrators

Trust is a powerful component in all relationships. "A leader's access to knowledge and cooperation is based on trust, with followers having faith that their leader will not abuse their rights or interests" (Robbins & Judge, 2010, p. 396). In differentiating from past administration, the new president and administrators can begin to build a rapport and gain the trust of their constituency groups through honesty and open communication. Inconsistent messaging and priorities can further deteriorate any remaining trust. It is crucial for new administrators to think through priorities before broadcasting them, ensuring the new commitments are realistic with consistent messaging throughout the administrative team (Galford & Drapeau, 2003, p. 91). Robbins and Judge (2010) state honesty is absolutely essential to leadership and that voluntary employee contribution is based on trust they have within their leader (pp. 395–397).

It has been established that if employees are allowed to experience the grieving process and are now at a place where forgiveness is a possibility, administration can take steps to begin rebuilding the foundation of trust through sensemaking. Many authors provide step-by-step guides to rebuilding trust. Caudron (2002) references a 12-step process to rebuild trust through communication after a "high-profile executive wrongdoing" (p. 10). This 12-step process is geared towards leaders regaining credibility through an in-depth communication process; these steps include having leaders be visible, share all the news (both good and bad), engage in communication with constituency groups, communicate more, and define the roles individuals play within the institution (Caudron, 2002, p. 10).

Caudron's 12 steps are applicable to the community college setting; specifically there are a number of steps that can assist community college leaders in reestablishing trust. Caudron's (2002) model encourages organizations to "get your leaders in front of people," creating accessibility, visibility, candor, demonstrating the leader's concern, and encouraging mutual respect and interaction. Encouraging leaders to "tell all the news you have—even the bad news," sharing all the information in a factual and analytical manner to prevent employees from jumping to conclusions can support the process. One of the most applicable steps to community college leaders is, "connecting with all stakeholders" especially communicating with involved constituency groups. "Reaching beyond the media," being present and accessible and communicating in person through group and individual meetings, is vital to creating rapport. This step also emphasizes not sending impersonal memos, letters, or emails, but allowing opportunities and modes of communication that are in-person so that employees hear relevant information directly from their leaders. Leaders within the institution must also "offer the op-

portunity for dialogue," again emphasizing the need for physical communication, dialogue, and demonstration so interpretation of communication can happen accurately. Reina and Reina (2011) touch on stakeholder buy-in as a key factor in organizational change and rebuilding trust within the workplace. The researchers state, "A leader's goals are irrelevant if employees aren't willing to embrace change; if they're not confident, committed, and engaged; and if they don't trust their leaders" (p. 12). "Listening to your people," asking how they are doing, what questions they may have, and making the effort to communicate positively is necessary to establish a relationship and create an open dialogue. Caudron also mentions that these steps do not have to be formal, and authentic and sincere communication is invaluable during this time. One of the most valuable steps is to "help people see their roles," communicating the goals of the organization and ensuring all constituency groups understand their role and the process being followed in the dynamic community college setting. Finally, leaders must "ask people to move on," limiting permission to whine, focus on the previous crises, and begin to refocus on the new institutional goals and shareholder/community values (Caudron, 2002, p. 10). By engaging in these steps, including all constituency groups, and creating a shared vision with individual buy in, leaders within a community college can begin to reestablish trust.

Mending Bridges: Healing through Participatory Governance

Caudron's (2002) emphasis on communication, candor, honesty, and engaging constituency groups lays the foundation for the healing process. At this point, faculty and staff have been allowed to grieve for their loss, create meaning for the incidents that have occurred and experience the emotional process of creating a new relationship with a new leader; they are now ready to begin engaging in conversations to heal the college morale. Participatory Governance serves as the means to heal the college and the hearts of its employees. California Education Code 70902(b)(7) requires faculty, staff, and students participate effectively in district and college governance (Community College League of California, 2014). This code emphasizes the need for the College Board and leadership to "consult collegially" and allow for faculty, classified staff, and students to effectively participate in decisions that affect them. Often called "shared governance," participatory governance is a more appropriate term as shared governance also implies shared responsibility, which is not the case, as administrators are held responsible for decision-making and subsequent consequences (Community College League of California, 2014).

Participatory governance plays a major role within California Community Colleges. Even community colleges in other states have begun to informally include participatory governance within their decision-making models. Throughout California Community Colleges, the Academic/Faculty Senate, California School Employees Association (CSEA) or Classified Senate, and Associated Student Government (ASG) participate through standing committees in order to

actively engage in decision-making processes. Although the president and administrators are not legally obligated to accept the recommendations of these constituency groups, their role and participation is critical within governance matters. The best situation is when the CEO and constituency groups are in agreement on recommendations for the college and to the board of trustees. However, if there is disagreement, the president is still obligated to make decisions in a timely manner, and engaging in participatory governance can clarify the points of agreement and disagreement (Community College League of California, 2014).

The participatory model of governance is fairly new compared with the authoritarian and bureaucratic models used in the past. Participatory governance is vital to the trust and internal wellness of community colleges. Presidents and administrators who do not actively engage in this participatory governance model can destroy trust and the ability to communicate with constituency groups on campus, creating long-term detrimental results. Most concerning is the amount of conflict, mistrust, and resentment that can occur if participatory governance is not recognized and employed. Many incidents experienced by community colleges have been due to the dissolution of communication with constituencies on campus (Sullivan, Reichard, & Shumate, 2005, p. 427).

Sullivan, Reichard, & Shumate (2005) highlight that community colleges are under constant pressure to increase participatory governance on campus, not only for the sake of morale, but for accountability and accreditation purposes (p. 427). In order to maintain a collaborative leadership style and open avenues of communication, leaders today must "use a more participatory approach that respects governance principles and capitalizes on the energy of teams (Sullivan, Reichard, & Shumate, 2005, p. 428). Today's colleges respond better to a participatory, collaborative model characterized by open communication, broad faculty and staff involvement, and shared decision-making (Sullivan, Reichard, & Shumate, 2005, p. 434). Today's colleges are also more reflective and accountable, using various means to gather empirical data measuring progress and positive change (Sullivan, Reichard, & Shumate, 2005, p. 441). However, the path to achieving a trusting and effective shared/participatory governance environment can be challenging. Piland & Randall (1998) discuss:

> There must be open communication and a large degree of mutual trust in a shared governance environment. The process of shared governance is lengthy, tedious, and difficult in terms of the need for increased interpersonal skills. The difficulty is finding the means of assessing appropriate and lasting responsibility for decisions and actions in a milieu of constant personnel change, in order that suitable roles for faculty, administrators, and staff are defined and accepted by all parties. The resulting empowerment of participants and the development of a new collegial relationship between formerly separate groups can lead to the emergence of an improved college environment, improved communication between all levels of college employees and students, and a greater understanding of the issues facing the college (p. 101).

As trust begins to redevelop among faculty, staff and administration, shared governance can be the path to recovery and to rebuilding a highly functioning college. One of the most important factors of shared governance, which has been discussed, is defining roles and expectations for all parties. Research supports that faculty and staff members express a clear desire to be included within the decision-making process (Piland & Randall, 1998, p. 109). However, defined roles and expectations must be made clear and communicated with candor throughout the process of rebuilding trust. Responsibilities such as faculty hiring, evaluation, and curriculum decisions are primarily faculty focused, whereas responsibilities such as goal setting, finances, and budget fall to the administration. Mutual and respectful participation should be encouraged throughout the college, engaging all constituency groups (Piland & Randal, 1998, p. 110). By clearly defining roles and embracing participatory governance, administrators can rebuild trust and work towards a mutually respectful and engaging environment. Specifically, presidents can focus on four areas to help lead this relationship-building process:

1. Envision a participative organization and what the college environment should be.
2. Preserve healthy interactions, ethics, and personal relationships.
3. Embrace the transformative nature of participatory governance and reaffirm the college's mission and vision.
4. Re-envision the college and its participatory governance models, ensuring the structure encourages efficiency and inclusiveness (Grasmick, Davies, & Harbour, 2012, pp. 70–74).

The Road to Redemption: Moving Forward Together to Rebuild Trust

As discussed, individuals recovering from a broken heart or broken trust can expect an arduous road to recovery, especially if the decision is made to rebuild the broken relationship. An array of emotions is experienced during the rebuilding of trust, foundations are broken and must be rebuilt, and respect and communication must be re-established. The faculty, staff, and administrators of community colleges who have experienced trauma must walk the road to redemption together. Collegial support must be reciprocated for the good of the institution and its students. An institution's vision, mission, goals, and student successes cannot be achieved when division, mistrust, anger, and fear exist. If administrators can walk with their constituency groups through the recovery process and bring about a moment of forgiveness, the college can begin to recover. Through "sensemaking," creating shared values, and engaging in participatory governance with candor, college presidents can heal their institutions and move the organization forward to achieve its student success goals. Administrators who are able to rebuild trust within their organization will have faculty and staff work harder,

stay with the company longer, contribute better ides, and work towards the common goal of student success (Galford & Drapeau, 2003, p. 92).

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