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Schools of Education in a New Era of Accountability: A Case Study of an Annual Report Process Used to Advance a Professional Learning Community

Manuel A. Aceves
Loyola Marymount University, maceves@lmu.edu

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Schools of Education in a New Era of Accountability: A Case Study of an Annual Report

Process Used to Advance a Professional Learning Community

by

Manuel A. Aceves

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Schools of Education in a New Era of Accountability: A Case Study of an Annual Report

Process Used to Advance a Professional Learning Community

This dissertation written by Manuel Aceves, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

_____ July 26, 2013
Date

Dissertation Committee

_____
Shane P. Martin, Ph.D, Committee Chair

_____
Ernesto Colín, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____
Mary McCullough, Ph.D., Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

Schools of Education in a New Era of Accountability: A Case Study of an Annual Report

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Institutions of higher education are entering a new era, one where cost, value, and quality are at

the front of mind. To proactively ensure long-term viability, institutions must operate

differently. This qualitative case study examined how the St. Alexander University School of

Education's Annual Report Process impacted institutional decision-making. Additionally, the

study explored how the Annual Report Process could facilitate learning and improvement for a

school of education.

Using the Professional Learning Community model as the conceptual framework,

document analysis, process analysis, and semi-structured interviews were used as the primary

methods for data collection. Using pattern analysis, four themes emerged in the study. First,

there is lack of shared vision and understanding regarding the purpose for the SOE Annual

Reports. Second, there is a disconnect between the SOE Annual Reports and the impact that

they play in the decision-making process related to resource allocation. Third, the level of

dialogue and impact that the SOE Annual Reports facilitate at the department and programmatic

level is mixed. Finally, there has been minimal training for the SOE Annual Report process,

which has resulted in a lack of quality in the reports. In turn, this has resulted in an overall

frustration with the process for those that are involved in the SOE Annual Report process. The

findings and recommendations in this study provide the SOE at St. Alexander a pathway to move

forward with an Annual Report Process that positively influences the building of learning

community, while positively impacting the decision-making process.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

National Context

The No Child Left Behind Act created a new sense of accountability for P-12 education. In this new era, public schools were required to test students annually and the results of those standardized tests were to be released to the public (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Driven by the federal government, this process created a new era of accountability, whereby schools were held accountable to the public, based on the data that were reflected in standardized test scores. However, this era of accountability in the early 2000s was primarily a phenomenon of the P-12 education field, and the same context was not present in higher education.

The context of accountability was much different for higher education during the early 2000s. The accountability for institutions of higher education was generally based on state and national accreditation requirements, not by the demands set by the federal government or the general public. However, when the United States faced a great economic recession in late 2007, the field of higher education experienced a major shift, similar to the shift that was present in P-12 education.

Higher education institutions are presently navigating uncharted areas of unstable financial environments, increased market-based decision making, and discord between faculty and administration (Claar & Scott, 2003; Dellow & Losinger, 2004; Schoorman & Acker-Hocevar, 2010; Schuh, 2003; Tierney & Minor, 2004; Volkwein, 2010). Constituents are demanding more from colleges and universities in the form of services and programs, financial

aid, and innovative methods while funding sources have dwindled (Burke, 2004; Schoorman &
Acker-Hocevar, 2010). Internal and external demands are coupled with regional accreditation
agencies that expect colleges and universities to report increased student learning and
professional outcomes through effective and efficient assessment measures (Dellow & Losinger,
2004; Volkwein, 2010).

President Barack Obama concretized the new notion of accountability for higher
education in the 2013 State of the Union Address. The President said that in order to ensure a
strong middle class for a strong nation, Americans must be equipped with the necessary skills to
compete in a global economy. In President Obama's view, higher education plays a role in
developing a strong nation, but cannot do so without accountability. In *The President's Plan for
a Strong Middle Class and a Strong America* (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary,
2013), the President detailed the following points to hold colleges and universities accountable
for cost, value, and quality:

> In an era of limited resources, we must allocate the federal investment in student aid
> wisely, in order to promote opportunity in higher education and ensure the best return on
> investment. The President will call on Congress to consider value, affordability, and
> student outcomes in making determinations about which colleges and universities receive
> access to federal student aid, either by incorporating measures of value and affordability
> into the existing accreditation system, or by establishing a new, alternative system of
> accreditation that would provide pathways for higher education models and colleges to
> receive federal student aid based on performance and results. (p. 5)

As such, a new *College Scorecard* was developed to allow easy access for families to obtain information about quality and costs for colleges and universities (http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/college-score-card). By making this information easily accessible, colleges and universities now need to focus attention to cost and outcomes in a new way.

The federal government is not the only entity raising the issue of cost, value, and quality in higher education. According to a Moody's Investor Service Report (2013), the 2013 outlook for the entire United States higher education sector is negative, including the market-leading, research-driven colleges and universities. The report goes further to state that higher education is at a critical juncture in evaluating the core business model and that in order to achieve long-term financial sustainability, universities must lower their cost structures (Moody's Investor Service, 2013). Furthermore, Moody's posits that universities will need strong governance and management as they navigate through this period of intensified change and challenge.

When looking at the national context, it would be fair to assert that some colleges and universities may not make it through this critical juncture. If universities are prudent, pro-active action must be taken now. If institutions are reactive to the changes taking place, there is severe risk that institutions may not be in operation five to 10 years from now. This study will explore the case of one university-based school of education and present possible strategic routes for universities to take for success within this new era of accountability.

Context for Saint Alexander University

This study focuses on one unit within St. Alexander University, a pseudonym, that is in midst of identifying a strategy to ensure success and viability during the present unstable time

period for institutions of higher education. St. Alexander University is a mid-sized university located in a large and extremely diverse city in the United States. St. Alexander University is composed of three schools and four colleges that serve both undergraduate and graduate students.

In 2010, St. Alexander University inaugurated a new president to lead the university. In 2012, St. Alexander University appointed a new provost/executive vice president to oversee the academic and operational aspects of the university. With the combination of new executive leadership at the university and the conclusion of the previous university strategic plan, the university was at a critical transition in ensuring that St. Alexander University be a strong educational option during this unstable period for institutions of higher education.

As the first step in moving forward, the president charged the university to develop a new university-wide strategic plan. The St. Alexander University community worked collaboratively for one year to develop this plan. The strategic planning process culminated in a strategic plan that was approved and adopted by the Board of Trustees in May 2012, which would set the future direction of St. Alexander University for the next eight years.

The leadership of St. Alexander University emphasized that in order for the university to thrive, the university strategic plan must be a document that is grounded in both the mission and current realities, and must be utilized when making decisions. The final version of the strategic plan demonstrated that the university community was aware of the current era of accountability in higher education, and one key theme focused on promoting competitiveness and accountability. An excerpt from the St. Alexander University strategic plan that addresses this area states:

Acknowledging that we are in a competitive environment, we will cultivate a university-wide passion for excellence and a sharp focus on communicating our successes. We will set high standards for all that we do, honestly assess goals and achievements, and develop a culture of continuous improvement. We understand that to achieve academic excellence and accountability for the cost of a St. Alexander education requires strategic prioritization of resources, innovative collaboration and high standards of operational excellence. (Saint Alexander University Strategic Plan, 2012)

As a next step in the strategic planning process, the leadership of St. Alexander University charged each school and college to develop unit-level plans that would need to align with the university strategic plan. To ensure that each school and college acknowledged the university's focus on competiveness and accountability, metrics were required for each goal and objective in order for progress to be checked regularly.

In an address outlining the charge to schools and colleges, the provost emphasized the importance of the specific plans being created by each school and college. The plans to be developed would not only guide the future direction for each school and college but also would determine priorities for resource allocation. The provost stated that given the high cost of tuition for students at St. Alexander University, the university would no longer be able to increase tuition at previous rates. By limiting tuition rate increases, the university acknowledged that there would be very limited additional revenue. With this reality, the university and each school and college needed to operate under the assumption that there would be no new revenue to support future work. This made the strategic planning process for each unit much more critical because what was identified in these plans would both guide future work and receive priority for

funding consideration. In some cases, this may equate to the reallocation of funds from one area to another.

Saint Alexander University School of Education

Even though the concept of competitiveness and accountability is not new to the School of Education (SOE) at St. Alexander University, the present era reframes the entire concept of what accountability actually means. The SOE has been successfully accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) since 1998, and one SOE programs holds national accreditation status in a specific field of study. In addition, the SOE has implemented several processes for continuous program review and improvement. One organizational process that focuses on programmatic and departmental review is the SOE Annual Report process. This process requires each program and department to review data, identify goals for programs and departments, and assess such goals on a yearly basis. Additionally, a portion of the annual review is dedicated to identifying future resources needed for programmatic and departmental success.

The SOE Annual Report process that the SOE implemented also aligns with the goals set by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the accrediting commission for senior colleges and universities. In order to be accredited by WASC, an institution must show evidence of meeting all standards set by WASC. Standard Four in the WASC Handbook of Accreditation states:

> The institution must show that it conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic

evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities at different levels of the institution and to revise institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work. (WASC Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, 2012, p. 21)

As demonstrated by the accomplishments and processes in place in the SOE, a type of accountability is present. However, the type of accountability present appears to reflect an older notion of accountability, which mainly focuses on accreditation standards. Even though this is the case, the SOE is moving toward acknowledging and confronting a new notion of accountability that is taking shape with pressures from the federal government and fiscal challenges. This is demonstrated with the language present in the draft of the SOE Strategic Plan that was recently submitted for approval. According to a draft of the new SOE Strategic Plan, the concept of accountability was embraced as a focus for the next eight years. It is important to note that this is the second SOE strategic plan and it will build on the goals and accomplishments that came from the first strategic plan in 2006.

In a draft of the SOE Strategic Plan (2013), the four following major themes were identified:

1. Excel as a Professional Learning Community in the Jesuit and Marymount Traditions
2. Lead Through Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement
3. Enhance Effectiveness Through Assessment and Accountability
4. Transform Teaching and Learning Through Innovative Uses of Technology

Of the four major themes identified, two are critical to this study. The first, as stated above, is theme three, which focuses on effectiveness through assessment and accountability. The second critical theme for this study is theme one, which commits the SOE to excelling as a Professional Learning Community.

Statement of the Problem

In this new era of accountability for institutions of higher education, St. Alexander University is directly positioned to address competitiveness and accountability. The need to focus and prioritize resource allocation strategically is critical, given the fact that the university will not be raising tuition significantly, thus having limited additional sources of revenue. In order to successfully prioritize initiatives and programs, the schools and colleges at St. Alexander University must develop processes that allow for continuous programmatic and departmental review.

The SOE at St. Alexander University has developed such a process with the establishment of the SOE Annual Report process. Given that the SOE Annual Report process analyzes the existing work of the SOE and has implications for resource allocation, a review of the existing process is critical in order to ensure that it addresses and acknowledges the new era of accountability and to ensure that the annual reports facilitate strategic decisions related to resources. No such review has taken place in the four years since the Annual Report process was developed.

However, if the focus for such an annual reporting process is limited in scope to only focus on resource allocation, an important element will be lost. To be fully impactful, the SOE Annual Report must facilitate dialogue, communication, collaboration, and learning. Universities

are unique because they provide an environment that fosters such discourse, which allows for the development of new ideas and the sharing of thoughts, with the goal of advancing different fields of study. Additionally, Tierney and Minor (2004) posited that colleges and universities are not simply the sum of the structural units that produce and disseminate knowledge within them; they are also places where symbolic and abstract cultural meanings are created. In the new era of accountability, it will be critical for universities to continue to demonstrate these qualities, as well as respond to the changing landscape.

Purpose of the Study

There were three primary purposes for this qualitative case study. The first purpose was to identify how the SOE Annual Report process impacts decision-making regarding resource allocation. The second purpose of this study was to examine how the information provided in the SOE Annual Report influences the people, programs, and SOE as a Professional Learning Community. The last purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature base in the areas of university decision-making related to resource allocation and in Professional Learning Community examples for higher education.

Significance of the Study

As universities continue to grapple with the new era of competitiveness and accountability, additional research is needed to guide future discussions. The significance of this study was identifying the link between decision-making for resource allocation and the annual report process of the SOE at St. Alexander's University. By researching this specific annual report process, the St. Alexander University SOE will be able to review the findings and make

any necessary adjustments in order to ensure that the annual report process contributes in the

decision making process, thus being responsive to the new era of accountability.

In addition to the significance above, the findings from this study may be used to inform

practice for similar universities within the emerging context of competitiveness and

accountability. A majority of the literature speaks to practice for assessment and accreditation,

with limited literature acknowledging and providing models for the new era of today. Given that

the purpose of this study was to identify how the SOE's existing Annual Report process impacts

decision-making regarding resource allocation, the findings from this specific process will be

informative for those looking to implement annual reporting models for resource allocation

decisions.

However, as mentioned previously, if the sole focus is simply on business and finance

decisions, the SOE Annual Report may not foster a community of learners. As such, the

research of this study is unique because it explored how a university could operate within this

new era of accountability, but at the same time, foster an environment that promotes learning and

collaboration. The literature regarding Professional Learning Communities is widespread for P-

12 education; however, it is extremely limited in higher education.

Professional Learning Community

To focus the research being conducted at the St. Alexander University School of

Education, I utilized the elements of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as the

conceptual framework. The concept of a PLC is seen widespread in P-12 education. However,

in higher education, examples of PLCs are sparse. Having few examples in higher education

should not be a deterring factor for universities to consider the value of the PLC model. On the

contrary, sparsity of PLC models in higher education should be a motivating force. If successfully implemented, a PLC in a university setting could be a model that would allow institutions to thrive during these unsettling times.

As stated previously, the SOE has committed to becoming a PLC, thus steps must be taken in order to fulfill that commitment. The primary element of a PLC is grounded in the philosophy that any effort made needs to have the involvement and commitment from the entire organization. As cited in the draft SOE Strategic Plan (2013), the SOE has defined the PLC in the following way:

Professional Learning Community (PLC) refers to the intentional learning of all participants and their application of the learning in all SOE activities and settings. The dimensions of a PLC include:

- Shared values and vision;

- Collegiality;

- Collective learning;

- Supportive and shared leadership;

- Data informed decision-making;

- Collaborative commitment to community and opportunity improvement;

- Closing the opportunity/achievement gap for traditionally marginalized students. (School of Education Strategic Plan, 2013, p.2)

Much of what is outlined in the SOE definition of a PLC is based on the five dimensions identified by Hord (1997), as cited by Hall and Hord (2001). Hall and Hord (2001) identify the following five dimensions of a PLC:

- Shared values and vision;

- Collective learning and application;

- Supportive and shared leadership;

- Supportive conditions;

- Shared personal practice. (Hall & Hord, 2001, p.197)

Research Questions

By utilizing the Professional Learning Community as the conceptual framework and in reviewing the statement of the problem, as well as the purpose, and the significance of the research, the following questions guided this study:

1. How does the existing St. Alexander University School of Education Annual Report Process impact decision-making regarding resource allocation?

2. In a Professional Learning Community model, how can an Annual Report Process facilitate learning and improvement for the School of Education?

Methodology

In identifying the best approach to answer the research questions, I utilized case study research as the primary method. Given that the focus of this study is at one site, a case study allowed for an in-depth study to explain the current phenomena (Yin, 2009). An in-depth understanding was needed in order to answer the research questions of the study.

This case study was conducted at the St. Alexander University School of Education. I utilized multiple data sets in this study to answer the research questions. First, I examined the process of the SOE annual reports, including instructions for completion and templates provided. Second, I conducted document analysis for three years of submitted and archived annual reports.

The three academic years examined are as follows: 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011.

Third, in order to identify linkage between the annual reports and decision-making regarding

resource allocation, I examined the SOE budget requests that were put forward in 2010, 2011,

and 2012. Fourth, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews of key SOE administrators,

faculty, and staff. By utilizing pattern analysis with the multiple data sets, I was able to identify

emergent themes. The different data sets allowed for data triangulation, which reflected a more

robust research methodology, and thus ensured the findings to be trustworthy.

Limitations

I, the researcher, hold a senior leadership position within the School of Education at St.

Alexander University. Being in a leadership position has allowed me to hear indirect comments

about the SOE Annual Report. However, in the five years of being in a leadership position, the

SOE Annual Report has never been a focus area for me. This separation of duties allowed me to

conduct this research without hesitation because it is not something in which I have been deeply

involved. At the same time, that simple fact, not being involved in the SOE Annual Report

process, speaks volumes and has prompted me to posit that the SOE Annual Report has little

impact in decision-making.

I also believe that colleges and universities must take a new strategic direction to stay

relevant and open for business in this volatile time. Being in a senior leadership position has

allowed me to participate and observe discussions held by deans of education at the national

level. Much of the current discussion, in my opinion, is reactive in thinking versus proactive.

Rather than discuss and put energy in new ideas for new directions, much of the dialogue is

defensive in nature. A defensive position is counterproductive and thus limits the ability to

respond to the current challenges. However, with the current economic crisis and the direction by the President of the United States, some guiding principles are becoming clear. If colleges and universities continue to ignore the path that is being put forward, they risk being in existence. I do not want that path for the SOE at St. Alexander University, thus I am invested in building a new path for the SOE to take.

Prior to transitioning to higher education, my background was in P-12 education, specifically as a middle school social science teacher and then as a middle school administrator. Being in that context for a number of years, I am familiar with the concept of a Professional Learning Community. It is a concept that I have embraced as a P-12 educator and one that I believe holds relevancy to the field of higher education.

While much of the data collected in this study came from a review of existing documents, interview data could have been influenced by my positionality. Depending on the comfort level of those that participated, some answers may not reflect the truest beliefs of those that were interviewed.

Delimitations

This study focused on one school of education at a private university. The intent of the study is to show an in-depth view of how this school of education is utilizing an annual report process to inform decision-making for resource allocation in an era of competitiveness and accountability. Additionally, the focus on a Professional Learning Community makes this study and site unique, due to the fact that PLC's are not widely seen in colleges and universities.

Definitions of Key Terms

Strategic Plan is a term to identify the document that lays out in broad strokes the university's priorities and plans for the next eight years.

Annual Report Process is a term used to identify the process of programmatic and departmental reviews in the SOE.

Accountability is a term used that is used which emphasizes the process of regularly assessing goals and achievements in the university; however, in the new era of accountability, accountability also refers to assessing the value of an education, within the framework provided by the President of the United States (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013, p.5).

Summary and Organization of the Dissertation

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify how the existing St. Alexander SOE's Annual Report process impacts decision-making regarding resource allocation, to examine how the information provided in the annual reports influences the people, programs, and SOE as Professional Learning Community, and to contribute to the literature base in both university decision-making related to resource allocation and in Professional Learning Community examples for higher education.

Chapter one introduces the national context for colleges and universities, the context of the setting where the study will take place, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the conceptual framework used for the study, in addition to the research questions and methodology for the study. The second chapter will explore the relevant literature to the proposed research questions. The third chapter will provide an overview of the methodology

used to answer the proposed questions. Chapter four of the study will provide the findings from the research. The final chapter will be a discussion of the findings and implications of the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify how the existing St. Alexander School of Education's Annual Report process impacts decision-making regarding resource allocation, to examine how the information provided in the annual reports influences the people, programs, and SOE as a Professional Learning Community, and to contribute to the literature in the areas of university decision-making related to resource allocation and in Professional Learning Community models for higher education. This chapter will explore the relevant literature related to the purpose of this study. In addition, the conceptual framework of the study will be detailed to provide the lens used to research the questions of this study.

President Barack Obama, in the 2013 State of the Union Address, concretized a new notion of accountability for higher education. In the address, the President called for a dialogue that would force colleges and universities to address cost, value, and quality. As a follow-up to the address, in *The President's Plan for a Strong Middle Class and a Strong America* (2013), the President detailed the following points to hold colleges and universities accountable for cost, value, and quality:

> In an era of limited resources, we must allocate the federal investment in student aid wisely, in order to promote opportunity in higher education and ensure the best return on investment. The President will call on Congress to consider value, affordability, and student outcomes in making determinations about which colleges and universities receive access to federal student aid, either by incorporating measures of value and affordability into the existing accreditation system, or by establishing a new, alternative system of

accreditation that would provide pathways for higher education models and colleges to receive federal student aid based on performance and results. (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013, p.5)

This new era has prompted colleges and universities to rethink what accountability means for higher education. In the previous area, accountability was primarily based off of standards set by national and/or state accreditation bodies.

In order to frame my understanding of the discourse related to this study and to allow myself to answer the research questions proposed, a review of relevant literature is necessary. The following areas will be explored in this review: (a) decision-making challenges in higher education; (b) a model for assessing institutional effectiveness; (c) the role of organizational culture in this context; and (d) the Vision, Implementation, Assessment (VIA) model for change. This chapter concludes with a review of literature on the Professional Learning Community model, which represents the key element of the conceptual framework guiding this dissertation.

Decision-Making Challenges for Higher Education

The crux of this study focuses on the SOE Annual Report at the St. Alexander University School of Education. One question specifically is looking at how the report impacts decision-making. To ground this discussion and study, an overview of the literature related to challenges within higher education and decision-making must be explored. Higher education faces many challenges related to decision-making and budget allocation. There has been a visible tension between faculty and administrators prior to the President's statements in the 2013 State of the Union Address. However, the concept of universities and colleges now having to be accountable

for cost, value, and quality may increase that tension if strategies are not put in place to address this issue directly.

Philosophical Challenges

Schoorman and Acker-Hocevar (2010) highlighted the tensions between faculty and administration's split visions on institutional direction assessed through market-based rationales. The strain for college administrators is deciding between adherence to current market demands and maintaining stagnant academic programs, or allowing weakened programs to continue (Dellow & Losinger, 2004; Tierney & Minor, 2004).

The market-based tension experience in colleges and universities throughout the United States do not seem to be subsiding especially with the constant demand for increased college ranking and prestige (Sweitzer & Volkwein, 2009; Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006). This is now even more visible with the direction that federal policy is moving in, which will hold universities and colleges accountable for cost, value, and quality. An additional factor that makes decision-making regarding resource allocation difficult for university administrators is when a school or college encounters growth (Zdziarki, 2010). As the school grows in faculty, professional staff, and students, efforts to predict enrollment trends and financial plans are critical to remain solvent.

Challenges from Within an Organization

With the market-based environment a reality for many institutions, understanding what is needed to make decisions soundly must be explored. One major piece needed when making decisions is the concept of buy-in. The issue of support and buy-in from faculty requires patience and political knowledge of the organization (Kezar & Eckel, 2004; Tierney, 2004; Zdziarki, 2010). The challenges related to budget decision-making within a college or university

may also revolve around the relationships and informal understandings between administration and faculty. Kezar and Eckel (2004) and Tierney and Minor (2004) posited that college officials have traditionally used informal decision-making strategies to guide institutional governance because decisions were based on personal interactions and relationships.

Hackman (1985) outlined the ability of an academic department to use its institutional power, such as length of time in the institution, support from the dean, or and interaction with central administration, to secure sufficient resources to progress. The role of faculty's institutional memory may also influence how they respond to administrators' discussions of programmatic changes (Tierney & Minor, 2004). Institutional memory may serve contradictory purposes for a school. For example, one faculty member with longer tenure at an institution may portray some of the positive or negative history with new faculty and administration. That individual may construct an alternate view of past developments with program creation, resource allocation, or faculty governance.

Kezar and Eckel (2004) strengthened this point by citing Baldridge's (1971) classic study of New York University that "debunked the myth that colleges and universities are primarily rational decision-making bodies. . . . [I]nformal deal making was so prevalent in his case study that it would be hard to know when formal processes were responsible for a decision within governance" (Kezar & Eckel, 2004, p. 382).

Furthermore, Tierney and Minor (2004) found that faculty felt they had relatively little formal influence in setting budget priorities. In the same study, Tierney and Minor (2004) found that perception differed greatly between faculty and administrators on this issue. The study stated:

Perceptual indicators, however, show divergent views. For example, when asked about

the quality of communication among campus constituents in decision-making, 88 percent

of academic vice presidents agreed that it was good, or sufficient to make progress,

compared to just 66 percent of faculty who agreed. (p.87)

The informal governance methods may pose challenges for administration due to "faculty

from different departments want different outcomes based on goals tied to their units" (Kezar &

Eckel, 2004, p. 378). As programs succeed and have opportunities for redevelopment, careful

tracking of budget allocation and expenditure will highlight which program(s) are the most cost

effective. However, this method continues to be viewed as a contentious matter within academia

(Barr, 2002; Barr & McClellan, 2011; Dellow & Losinger, 2004; Ginsburg, 1997; Wong &

Tierney, 2001).

Need for Programmatic Review

As universities grapple with the challenges related to decision-making, including the

typical informal practices related to decision-making, practices must shift from informality to a

more robust and systematic, programmatic review. Ellis (2010) stressed the importance of

constant program review and communication with all stakeholders in the planning efforts as a

way to address the challenges that come from informal decision-making processes. Volkwein

(2010) added that postsecondary institutions should design effective and pragmatic measures to

determine program effectiveness through a "culture of evidence that promotes academic self-

renewal" (p. 20). It is important to build from previous budget understandings and design

methods, but retooling the university academic programs efforts are important in maintaining

financial solvency and supporting programs that are constantly growing. The informal budget

decisions within colleges and universities may not challenge colleagues if performance or cost effective measures related to the shortage or abundance of resources are not met (Dellow & Losinger, 2004; Volkwein, 2010).

As cited above, it is recommended that regular program review is necessary. This periodic program review and analysis will allow administrators to make thoughtful decisions related to budget. The delay and impact of deterring program cost analysis and resource allocation can prolong a potential redistribution of human and financial capital (Dellow & Losinger, 2004).

Dellow and Losinger (2004) used student enrollment trend data to inform college faculty and staff of the "imbalances [in] programming resources" to justify the reallocating of resources (p. 679). In addition to other program measures, they used the cost per credit hour data and a regional employment needs tool, which allowed all college faculty and professional staff members to understand how program elimination and redevelopment were utilized (Dellow & Losinger, 2004). Additionally, the academic cost of programs was distributed to faculty and staff senate meetings, board of supervisors, and other key stakeholders in order to ensure that each group understood the enrollment and student outcomes. With the administration incorporating an open-information method, this dispelled the perception of mistrust or maligned intentions to harm academic programs.

Barr (2002) supported the need for college administrators to "assess all program offerings of the department to determine whether any can be dropped, modified, or consolidated" (p. 81). Dellow and Losinger (2004) based program assessment on the following guidelines:

1. History, development, and expectations for program

2. External demand for the program

3. Internal demand for the program

4. Quality of program inputs and processes

5. Quality of program outcomes

6. Size, scope, and productivity of the program

7. Revenue and other resources generated by the program

8. Costs and other expenses associated with the program

9. Impact, justification, and overall essentially of the program

10. Opportunity analysis of the program. (p.686)

One way to build upon Dellow and Losinger's (2004) guidelines is to incorporate student-learning outcomes, retention, and placement of graduates to the conversation. As the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) manual (2012) indicates, colleges and universities must construct thoughtful assessment tools to measure, through mixed-methods, the "evidence of educational effectiveness" in student learning (p. 21). In addition, WASC (2012) expects colleges and universities to build a culture of evidence through: "periodic program review, ongoing evaluation, and data collection" (p. 21). WASC also expects postsecondary institutions to "[I]nclude assessing effectiveness, tracking results over time, using comparative data from external sources, and improving structures, processes, curricula, and pedagogy" (pp. 21-22). Wolff (2005) asserted that regional accreditation agencies are slowly asking colleges and universities, "Are you doing things right—effectively, efficiently—in ways that truly satisfy the need of those you are serving?" (p. 94).

Shared Governance

Shared governance is a fundamental element of higher education. Tierney (2004) stressed that faculty and administration must come to consensus about how governance is structured in an institution and how that will impact decisions. Tierney and Minor (2004) also stressed the importance of verbal or written communication to establish organizational culture and expectations for faculty and college governance. The artifacts created may allow future faculty and college governances to understand past challenges and developments through departmental meetings agendas, white papers, or other institutional documents (Schoorman & Acker-Hocevar, 2010; Tierney & Minor, 2004).

Kezar and Eckel (2004) suggested that various conditions influence whether a governance structure will be effective including "clarification of roles, redundancy of function, trust and accountability, norms and values, composition of the governance groups, and leadership" (p. 386). The conditions listed by Kezar and Eckel (2004) illuminated factors that may affect the relationships and challenges between college faculty and administration. Tierney (2004) questioned whether universities, in particular faculty and administration, are prepared for the challenging conditions to compete in the twenty-first century.

Volkwein Model for Assessing Institutional Effectiveness

To build off the identified idea and need to regularly review programs, budget, and outcomes, Volkwein (2010) detailed a model that can be used to assess institutional effectiveness. The Volkewein model examined institutional performance, academic programs, faculty productivity, and students. As previously mentioned, the demands from internal and external stakeholders to increase academic program efficiency, student support services, and financial aid

in postsecondary education may continue to rise over the next decade. However, the measures to assess the demands are not fully embraced by external accreditation expectations or standards. Volkwein's (2010) model suggested that institutions could better evaluate how standards and productivity are measured in a linear and step-by-step fashion.

The first step in the model examined concepts by determining the internal and external accountabilities, in addition to areas for improvement. The second step asked five questions that help institutions understand which methods and measures should be used. The first question asked, "Are you meeting your learning goals?" This question can be applied to ask, "What should students be learning?" and "What are the goals and purpose of this [academic] program?" In addition, the answers "require clear, measurable goals, and objectives that should be answered by program faculty and administration" (Volkwein, 2010, p. 15).

The second question asked, "Are you improving?" This question prompted a self-measure of improvement over a period of time. Institutions should create evaluations of performance over a period of time to see growth in student enrollment, faculty productivity, and other values. Volkwein (2010) suggested that institutions recognize "[P]rograms are at different starting points" (p. 16).

The third question explored whether the program meets professional standards. The professional standards can be measured through external agencies such as WASC or other organizations that have established rubrics. Professional standards may provide a view of external expectations in order to award credentials or certificates.

The fourth question explored how the institution or academic program compares to peers. Some institutions use the U.S. News and World Report as an indicator of academic performance

to their peers. For instance, some institutions may use published reports from peer institutions as a measure of success in enrollment, external funding received, and faculty productivity. Administrators should be mindful of whatever measurement tool is used to gauge program or faculty productivity and should also be thoughtful in their institutional benchmarking strategies (Volkwein, 2010, p. 16).

Finally, question five prompted a discussion about finance and asked, "Are the program efforts cost effective?" This question has the potential to cause internal conflict about which programs produce the most revenue, have largest enrollments, or have a longer legacy and institutional value. One way to begin this discussion is by identifying which programs are the most cost effective, have the shortest time to degree attainment, and have the largest institutional impact. Again, measurements should be aligned to the institutional values.

The Role of Organizational Culture

In discussing the challenges related to decision-making and the need for systematic programmatic review to help work through those challenges, it is important to pay attention to the organizational culture within an organization. Schein (2010) outlined the following concepts of culture in an organization:

- observed behavioral regularities when people interact;
- group norms;
- espoused values;
- formal philosophy;
- rules of the game;
- climate;

- embedded skills;

- habits of thinking, mental models, and/or linguistic paradigms;

- shared meanings;

- "root metaphors" or integrating symbols;

- formal rituals and celebrations. (pp.14-16)

With these important characteristics identified, it is surprising how often organizational culture is ignored when implementing change. The following section gives a cursory review of a foundational framework that demonstrates the importance of organizational culture in higher education.

Tierney framework for organizational culture. The Tierney (1988) framework focused on organizational culture to allow colleges and universities to understand the role of management and performance within an institution. University administrators must be politically savvy to build meaningful relationships and partnerships with stakeholders in order to drive the mission of an institution, while connecting with the pulse of faculty and professional staff to measure their disposition. Tierney (1988) acknowledged the internal and external forces that influence the "values, processes, and goals" for an organization (p. 3). Within the values and goals of a college, the forces and tensions should motivate management to recognize the culture, history, and institution norms, which is a needed step to avoid a contentious relationship with stakeholders.

Building a shared goal for administrators, faculty, and staff may be a challenge if organizational culture is not valued. Tierney (1988) stated, "The understanding of culture will aid administrators in spotting and resolving potential conflicts and in managing change more

effectively and efficiently" (p. 6). Tierney's qualitative study encouraged institutional, "leaders [to] have a full, nuanced understanding of the organizational culture [...] then [they] can articulate decisions in a way that will speak to the needs of various constituents and marshal their support [… and] influences the decision" (p. 5).

The framework proposed by Tierney (1988) for organizational culture is simple in design, however includes competing variables for a university to progress toward excellence. His work allowed us to acknowledge the use of power, politics, and vision in forming or initiating a cultural shift within an organization by focusing on six different areas that impact organizational culture's ability to manage performance within an institution.

Tierney (1988) outlined the following six concepts as essential when investigating colleges and universities. The first area of focus was the college environment, which allows researchers to understand the context of an institution. One may examine the interactions between a board of governors and college administration, the student demographics, the number of tenure versus adjunct faculty, or enrollment trends.

The second area of focus involved the mission of the institution. For example, the dean can articulate the mission as which students are served, or degree programs offered that reflect market demands. In addition, the shared mission allows stakeholders to understand how to measure institutional successes and challenges.

The third area of focus described how new members of an organization are acculturated into the community. Socialization can be exhibited through how faculty welcome new students, the methods that students engage their academic advisors for guidance and support, or how the university administration develops policies.

The fourth area focused on information, including the methods used to disseminate information to both internal and external constituents through both formal and informal means. This section outlined the fact that the university administration has an opportunity to establish the culture of communicating with students, faculty, professional staff, and the local community about news and knowledge of accomplishments.

The fifth concept focused on strategy, which references how university administrators propose initiatives and academic programs to be developed. The role of strategy is connected to the environment and how the environment is supported by administration. Simple symbolic strategies include using "open-door policies" to demonstrate to peers and students a climate of partnership.

The sixth and final concept focused on leadership. This concept embodied how administrators or other campus leaders use "symbolic communication" through actions that reinforce institutional culture (Tierney, 1988, p. 16).

Vision, Implementation, Assessment Model for Change (VIA)

If organizations are to do things differently to address the challenges related to decision-making, an understanding of organizational change is needed. In reviewing the number of elements needed to address the challenges that are associated with change, Fullan (2009) repeatedly discussed the importance of vision as an essential element in the change process. Bridges (2009) stated that being clear on purpose and vision is essential for successful change. Owens and Valesky (2011) also emphasized the importance of vision to move an organization forward. In the number of models of change reviewed by Fullan (2001), vision is a common, essential element that is present.

With vision being such an important element, it is no surprise that it is also the first element for change described by McCullough, Graf, Leung, Stroud, and Orlando (2008) in the Vision, Assessment, and Implementation (VIA) model for change. In this model, McCullough et al. (2008) posited that the first step needed is an agreed upon vision, meaning a shared vision by all stakeholders. The second component of the VIA model is the implementation plan. McCullough et al. stated that careful steps must be identified when implementing a new process or change. This second component must plan for action steps, personnel, resources needed, and any essential timeline components. The third step in this process is the plan for assessment. McCullough et al. stated that a plan to assess or analyze a new process or program is vital. In all of these steps, McCullough et al. stated that all three of these components must be well thought out, at the beginning, if change will be successful. The VIA model is used in Chapter 5 of this dissertation to discuss recommendations.

Conceptual Framework

The overview of literature provided thus far has provided a brief overview of the challenges that higher education face when making decisions related to resource allocation, a possible framework for assessing institutional effectiveness, a framework that uses organizational culture as a foundation to understand the role of management and performance in higher education, and the VIA model for change. Each of these areas are critical for one purpose of the study: examining how the School of Education's Annual Report process impacts decision-making regarding resource allocation.

However, the other purpose of the study was to examine how the information provided in the annual reports influences the people, programs, and SOE as Professional Learning

Community. To address this purpose, the Professional Learning Community model was selected as the conceptual framework for this study. The reason this framework was selected is two fold: (a) the SOE at St. Alexander will be implementing the PLC in the next year; (b) the framework may allow the SOE to address the challenges in this new era of accountability, in addition to addressing the challenges related to fiscal decision-making and programmatic review. In many ways, the PLC can also incorporate the elements identified by Volkwein (2010) and Tierney (1988, 2004) that were detailed previously.

In order to successfully implement the PLC, change will need to take place within the SOE at St. Alexander University. Schunk and Mullen (2011) stated that the workplace culture must be changed in order for the PLC to be effective. Change, in itself, is difficult. The difficulties associated with change, mixed with the external challenges that higher education face presently, present a large hurdle. In addressing the external forces universities are now facing, Eaton (2010) argued that it is time to get beyond complaints expressed at conference sessions and in journal articles replete with unhappiness and have a more productive exchange. That productive exchange can be displayed within a PLC. Hilliard (2012) articulated that higher education could benefit from a PLC if it reflects a setting where faculty, students, university leaders, and staff work together in a collaborative manner to improve their own learning experiences and to ensure that students will be prepared with skills, knowledge and an appropriate attitude to be competitive in the marketplace in a global society. An overview of the key elements of a PLC will be discussed in the following section.

The Professional Learning Community

The SOE at St. Alexander University has committed to becoming a PLC, thus steps must be taken in order to fulfill that commitment. The primary element of a PLC is grounded in the philosophy that any effort made needs to have the involvement and commitment from the entire organization. As cited in the draft SOE Strategic Plan (2013), the SOE has defined the PLC in the following way:

Professional Learning Community (PLC) refers to the intentional learning of all participants and their application of the learning in all SOE activities and settings. The dimensions of a PLC include:

- shared values and vision;

- collegiality;

- collective learning;

- supportive and shared leadership;

- data informed decision-making;

- collaborative commitment to community and opportunity improvement;

- closing the opportunity/achievement gap for traditionally marginalized students. (School of Education Strategic Plan, 2013, p.2)

Much of what is outlined in the SOE definition of a PLC is based on the five dimensions identified by Hord (1997). As cited by Hall and Hord (2001), Hord (1997) identified the following five dimensions of a PLC:

- shared values and vision;

- collective learning and application;

- supportive and shared leadership;

- supportive conditions;

- shared personal practice. (p.197)

DuFour and Eaker (1998) provided a foundation for much of the discourse related to the PLC in education. DuFour and Eaker (1998) outlined the following four building blocks to a PLC: (a) mission; (b) vision; (c) values; and (d) goals. In addition, DuFour and Eaker (1998) outlined the following key principles for a PLC:

- shared mission, vision, and values;

- collective inquiry;

- collaborative teams;

- action orientation and experimentation;

- continuous improvement;

- results orientation. (pp.25-29)

In reviewing the foundational elements by both Hall and Hord (2001) and Dufour and Eaker (1998), there is a good amount of overlap with the elements identified as necessary for a PLC. The following sections will give additional context to the elements identified thus far.

Shared Values and Vision

In reviewing the literature, there is abundant emphasis on the importance of both the values and vision of an organization. Hall and Hord (2001) posited that in a PLC, the community has an unswerving commitment to student learning and the vision of the PLC maintains a focus on quality, in the work of the staff and the students. Cranston (2009) posited that clarity on vision is needed from the leadership or it will negatively impact the PLC.

Cranston (2009) stated that the efforts associated with nurturing a PLC will lack results if a key figure in developing and nurturing it – the principal or leader – lacks the clarity of what a school as professional learning community is, and what is required for a school to become one.

Collective Learning and Application

Hall and Hord (2001) articulated that in a PLC, individuals within the organization work collaboratively, where reflective dialogue forces debate about what is important, thus provides the community with opportunities for learning from and with each other. This environment thus promotes the sharing of new ideas and shared decision-making. Additionally, this concept emphasized the application of the learning to solutions that address students' needs.

The concept of collective learning also supports the notion of multiple communities being developed within a PLC, as long as the different communities are working toward the shared vision of the organization as a whole. Kelly (2013) outlined the concept of multiple communities by demonstrating the following example:

> Each group organized their community in slightly different ways, depending on the needs of the group and the subjects within the group. The communities were connected to the overall school-wide goal of writing improvement. They were given the freedom to decide how to best utilize the time they spent together each month, and how to organize their community. (p.2)

Supportive and Shared Leadership

Hall and Hord (2001) outlined three factors for leaders operating as a PLC. First, leaders must share authority. Second, leaders must have the ability to facilitate the work of the faculty and staff. Finally, leaders must have the capacity to participate without dominating. All of these

factors will promote the concept that power and authority is shared, which will thus reflect an environment where decision-making is shared. Katz and Earl (2010) supported this by stating:

> Learning communities encourage distributed leadership in schools and across the network, with many people with and without formal positions of authority providing a range of leadership functions such as leading particular initiatives, participating in collaborative groups, supporting colleagues learning and sharing their knowledge with others. (p.32)

Some leaders may find these concepts difficult to manage because there are times when decisive leadership is necessary to move an organization forward. Garrett (2010) stated that a leader cannot impose a PLC but at the same time, cannot wait for it to happen. Lawrence and Ott (2012) shared a perspective that will assist with developing buy-in for the PLC model. They concluded that when faculty believe collegial decision-making is valued and rewarded and when professional authority is recognized, faculty are more likely to engage in governance activities. Winter (2009) advanced this one step further by outlining that an important strategic principle for the bridging of academic identities is the recognition that neither an administration nor body of faculty can change effectively without understanding the values of the other.

Supportive Conditions

Hall and Hord (2001) posited that supportive conditions are necessary for a PLC to be successful. Specifically, they state the following:

> Supportive conditions provide the infrastructure and basic requirements of the when, where, and how the staff can collectively come together as a whole to learn, make decisions, do creative problem-solving and implement new practices. Both physical and structural conditions are necessary. (p. 199)

Harris and Jones (2010) acknowledged that structural challenges are often one of the first challenges seen when implementing a PLC. Specifically they stated: "Organizational structures and strong subject boundaries can prove to be barriers in building whole school learning communities" (p. 178).

Shared Personal Practice

In a PLC, shared personal practice refers to the feedback and assistance from peers that support individual and community involvement (Hall & Hord, 2001). Hall and Hord (2001) also indicated that this process may be difficult because of the time needed to plan for this. One of the first characteristics identified by Louis and Kruse (1995, as cited in Harris & Jones, 2010) of a productive learning community is a willingness to accept feedback and to work toward improvement. However, the benefits that come from sharing and learning are great when this is fully implemented. When looking at one of the few examples of a PLC in a university setting, Grierson et al. (2012) posited that collaborative self-study can provide a vehicle to deepen teacher educators' understandings of their practices, and also of themselves, their colleagues, their candidates, and their program.

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Summary

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This chapter reviewed the relevant literature for this study. The following areas were reviewed: (a) decision-making challenges in higher education; (b) model for assessing institutional effectiveness; (c) role of organizational culture; (d) the VIA model for change; and (e) the conceptual framework: the Professional Learning Community model. The next chapter will detail the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this qualitative case study. In this chapter, I describe why a qualitative case study was the most appropriate methodology to answer the research questions. In addition, I detail the methodology used in this study, the methods of data collection, a description of the site of study, a description of the participants and the criteria used to select the sample, the procedures for data, collection, and the type of analysis used to analyze the data. The chapter concludes by addressing the issues of validity and reliability for this study, in addition to my positionality.

Research Questions

By utilizing the Professional Learning Community as the conceptual framework and in reviewing the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the research, the following questions guided this study:

1. How does the existing St. Alexander University School of Education Annual Report Process impact decision-making regarding resource allocation?

2. In a Professional Learning Community model, how can an Annual Report Process facilitate learning and improvement for the School of Education?

I utilized case study methodology to collect the data needed to answer the research questions in this study. Case study methodology allows for an in-depth understanding of the process and data from the SOE Annual Reports, and successfully explains a current phenomenon (Yin, 2009).

Methodology

There were three primary purposes for this qualitative case study. The first purpose was to identify how the School of Education's existing annual report process impacts decision-making regarding resource allocation. The second purpose of this study was to examine how the information provided in the annual reports influences the people, programs, and SOE as a Professional Learning Community. The last purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature base in the areas of university decision-making related to resource allocation and in Professional Learning Community examples for higher education.

A descriptive set of data was necessary to answer the proposed research questions and to address the purposes identified for this study. According to Hatch (2002), qualitative research is the methodological approach that aims to produce descriptive data. Further, it directs itself at settings and individuals within those settings holistically. Thus the subject of the study is not reduced to an isolated variable or hypothesis, but is viewed as part of a whole. Understanding the subject of study as a whole and gathering rich and descriptive data is important in this methodology. Therefore, a qualitative approach as described by Hatch (2002) would be the best to gather such data.

Furthermore, case study methodology was utilized for this qualitative study. Yin (2009) posited that utilizing case study methodology allows a researcher to understand the "how" and "why" of a context. Since both questions of this study focused on the "how," I utilized case study methodology to gather enough descriptive data to answer the questions on "how."

Data Collection Method

This case study was conducted at the St. Alexander University School of Education. I utilized multiple data sets in this study to answer the research questions. First, I examined the process of the SOE annual reports, including instructions for completion and templates provided. Second, I conducted a document analysis for three years of submitted and archived annual reports. The three academic years examined included: 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011. Third, in order to identify linkage between the annual reports and decision making regarding resource allocation, I examined the SOE budget requests that were put forward in 2010, 2011, and 2012. Fourth, I conducted semi-structured individual interviews of key SOE administrators, faculty, and staff. By utilizing pattern analysis with the multiple data sets, I was able to identify emergent themes (Thomas, 2006). The different data sets allowed for data triangulation, thus ensuring a more robust research methodology (Patton, 2002).

Analysis of the process for the SOE Annual Report. One area of focus for this study was gaining an understanding on how the existing St. Alexander SOE Annual Report impacts decision-making related to resource allocation. To gain this understanding, I began this study by examining the SOE Annual Report process and analyzing what the SOE Annual Report asks for, in addition to examining the instructions provided to complete the report and the template provided to those that must complete the reports annually. The examination of the SOE Annual Report process allowed me to gather data to examine the other areas of focus in this study. A detailed examination of the SOE Annual Report process yielded sufficient data to utilize in the study (Hatch, 2002).

Document analysis. A key source of data for this study came from reviewing the SOE Annual Reports. To understand how the reports impacted decision-making related to resources, I needed to review all the reports that were generated to date. Therefore, I analyzed three academic years of submitted SOE Annual Reports that included: 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011. In order to identify the linkage between the SOE Annual Reports and decision-making regarding resource allocation, I also examined the SOE budget requests that were put forward in 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Hatch (2002) posited that using document analysis allows a researcher to gain context before speaking directly to those that have been involved. Therefore I utilized document analysis before engaging with semi-structured interviews. This was intentional and was based on the previously stated concept by Hatch (2002). I gained background context by reviewing the SOE Annual Reports and thus allowed me to engage more authentically with those that were interviewed.

Semi-structured interviews. Hatch (2002) posited that interviews allow a researcher to gather descriptive data and to gain an understanding of the perceptions of those involved in a study. Therefore, an understanding of those who had been involved in the St. Alexander University SOE Annual Report process was critical. Each identified participant has a unique position in the university, which will be described in a future section. However, gaining an understanding from each participant and capturing the unique voice and role that each individual plays, was a major goal that I wished to accomplish. See Appendix A for interview questions.

Description of the Site

This study was conducted at St. Alexander University, a pseudonym for a mid-sized private university located in a large, diverse city in the United States. St. Alexander University is composed of several schools and colleges that serve both undergraduate and graduate students. St. Alexander is part of a network of Jesuit colleges and universities.

According to materials provided by the St. Alexander University website, the mission statement is as follows:

> St. Alexander University declares its mission and purpose to be the following: the service of faith and the promotion of justice, the encouragement of learning, and the education of the whole person. Being rooted in Jesuit tradition, St. Alexander University follows in their strong dedication to education. A committee on campus meets regularly to analyze the campus' overall strengths and weaknesses in fulfilling this mission statement.

According to the same materials provided by St. Alexander University, the university is organized in the following manner:

- The governing body of the university is the school's independent Board of Trustees, headed by a Chairperson.
- The University's executive officer is the President. Prior to 2009, a prerequisite to serve as the University's president was membership in the Society of Jesus, however, the Board of Trustees voted to allow educators not a part of the Jesuit Order to become president. These changes were made at the recommendation of the American Assistance of Jesuits, the collective body of Jesuits in the United States in response to

the declining number of Jesuits as well as those prepared to serve as the president of a major university.

- The President is assisted by the Chancellor, Assistant to the President, Director for Internal Audit, The Vice President for Mission and Ministry (under whose direction the Office of Campus Ministry and the Center for Ignatian Spirituality operates) and the Vice President for Intercultural Affairs.

- The Executive Vice President & Provost reports directly to the President and oversees all campus operations.

- The University Cabinet consists of: The President, Executive Vice President & Provost, Senior Vice President & Chief Academic Officer (under whose direction the Deans of the College of Liberal Arts, College of Business Administration, College of Communication and Fine Arts, College of Science and Engineering, School of Education, School of Film and Television, and University Libraries operate), Senior Vice President for Administration, Senior Vice President & Chief Financial Officer, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs, Senior Vice President for University Relations, and Dean of the Law School.

The most recently available enrollment information, as of January 2013, for St. Alexander University is as follows:

- Undergraduate: 5,962; Graduate: 2,129; Law School: 1,278; Total: 9,369

- Average undergraduate class size: 21

- Average graduate class size: 15

- Student to faculty ratio: 11-1

- Ethnicity of students: American Indian/Alaska Native: 0.3%; African-American: 5.6%; Asian: 9.8%; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 0.2%; Hispanic/Latino: 22.0%; Caucasian: 50.6%; Multi-race: 7.3%; International: 4.2%

- Undergraduate students by geographic origin: In-state: 76%; Out-of-state: 24%

Further, the focus of the study will be on the St. Alexander University School of Education. Recently, the St. Alexander University SOE has grown in student enrollment, academic programs, and its U.S. News & World Report ranking. This growth is reflective of the initiatives and work that took place under the first strategic plan, which was implemented in 2006.

According to the St. Alexander University School of Education website, the St. Alexander University School of Education Mission Statement is as follows:

In accordance with the Mission of St. Alexander University, the faculty, staff, and students of the School of Education understand and declare our purpose to be the encouragement of life-long learning and academic excellence, the education of the whole person, and the promotion of service and justice for all. We commit ourselves to serving public and private education by fostering excellence inspired by the Marymount and Jesuit traditions of Catholic education.

The faculty, staff and students of the School of Education strive to work collaboratively in a student-centered environment to be professionals who act to:

- Value and respect all individuals

- Promote social justice

- Promote cultural responsiveness

- Integrate theory and practice

- Develop moral, intellectual, responsible, and caring leaders

- Collaborate and share leadership across communities. (School of Education Mission Statement)

According to the 2012 St. Alexander SOE Annual Report, the SOE student body reflects the following:

- Total enrollment: 1,219 Students

- Average class Size: 15.2 Students

- Ethnicity of students: African American: 8.8%; Asian/Pacific-Islander: 10.0%; Latina/o: 30.7%; Multirace: 4.4%; Native American: 0.5%; White: 43.9%; Other: 1.7%. (School of Education Published Annual Report, p.1)

To provide additional context outside of standard quantitative figures, the following statement was published by the St. Alexander School of Education in their most recent published SOE Annual Report, which provides context on the type of School of Education that this institution is striving to be:

> For our PreK-12 educational system to flourish, business as usual must give way to breakthroughs. That's why the School of Education continues to do things differently. Through educator programs that blend theory with real-world practice while emphasizing social justice, we are preparing a new generation of leaders who are transforming classrooms, school communities and districts. Through innovative research and partnerships that foster academic excellence and opportunity, we are establishing new models or success in public, charter and Catholic education.

These efforts are drawing attention – and support. We continue our rise in the

2013 edition of the U.S. News & World Report's Best Graduate Schools of Education,

placing in the top 6 percent of the more than 1,500 schools, colleges and departments of

education nationwide. In the last two years, the SOE has vaulted an unprecedented 48

spots and is now ranked 83rd in the nation. Support for the SOE's mission is also

reflected in a just-concluded capital campaign that raised $20.4 million – more than

double the original campaign goal – to enhance our ability to make an impact in

improving educational opportunity and equity for all students.

The challenges are steep but the stakes are too high and the urgency too great to

stand by and let others lead. Buoyed by the support of our peers, benefactors and partners,

the School of Education is better positioned than ever to help generate the breakthroughs

that move education forward. (School of Education Published Annual Report, p.1)

Gaining Entry to the Site

Gaining entry to the research site is essential for any research project to be successful.

Schatzman & Strauss (1973) stated that the researcher must establish credibility and enter into

relationships. If this is not done, the researcher may be left without any access, thus leaving the

researcher unable to accomplish what he or she sets out to do.

As the researcher of this study, my positionality is important to discuss. I hold a senior

leadership position at the proposed site of study. In that position, I am responsible for overseeing

partnerships and communications for the St. Alexander SOE. In this position, I have access to

key documents and access to engage directly with other individuals that hold leadership positions

at the St. Alexander SOE.

The charge for this specific research study was the result of a conversation between myself and the Dean of the St. Alexander SOE. In that discussion, the Dean articulated a need to examine the SOE Annual Report process. The Dean shared this idea with me knowing that I was reflecting on a research topic for my dissertation. In additional dialogue, it was agreed that this research study would be appropriate for me to explore. This is due to the fact that although I hold a senior leadership position in the school, I have not been directly associated with the SOE Annual Report process. It was agreed that this separation would allow me to investigate the SOE Annual Report process with less bias when entering into research.

The Dean of the St. Alexander SOE articulated this study as a direct need for the SOE. The proposed research questions will not only attempt to contribute to the literature in this area of research but as equally important, contribute so that the research site benefits from the study. Schatzman & Strauss (1973) stated that reciprocity in research is important, ensuring that each side benefits. The research findings in this study demonstrated reciprocity as described by Schatzman and Strauss (1973).

Description of the Participants

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured method. Purposeful criterion sampling was used to select the participants. The logic of criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2002, p. 238). Furthermore, Patton (2002) stated that "the point of criterion sampling is to be sure to understand cases that are likely to be information-rich because they may reveal major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement" (p. 238).

Participants needed to meet the following criteria to participate in the semi-structured interviews: be an employee of the St. Alexander University SOE and have previous involvement in the SOE annual report process. With these criteria set, I interviewed individuals from the SOE administration, SOE department leadership, and SOE program leadership. To gather enough data on the SOE Annual Report process, a large enough pool was needed. I engaged 12 individuals who met the participant criteria. Nine individuals participated in semi-structured interviews. Three individuals were not available for interviews and requested to provide written feedback. Of the 12 individuals that participated, four individuals provided data for dual roles. Additionally, of the 12 individuals that participated, four individuals held roles in the SOE administration and leadership, three held roles in department leadership, and five participants held roles in program leadership. A detailed overview of the participants is provided in the following section:

1. SOE Administration and Leadership:

    a. Dean of the SOE: Acts as the Chief Executive and Academic Officer for the SOE and provided data regarding vision, goals, and need for the SOE Annual Report;

    b. Associate Dean for Business Services: Oversees all business and finance operations for the SOE and provided data regarding resource decision-making;

    c. Assistant Dean for Academic Services: Oversees academic programs, clinical practice, and accreditation and assessment in the SOE. The SOE Annual Report process falls within the area of accreditation and assessment. Before holding this position, this individual was an Academic Program Director that participated in

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the SOE Annual Report process. This individual provided data on purpose, process, and experience with the SOE Annual Report process;

 d. Director of Assessment: Works with department chairs and academic program directors in managing the SOE Annual Report submission process. This individual provided data on purpose, process, and experience with the SOE Annual Report process.

2. SOE Department Leadership

 a. Department Chair of Educational Leadership: In addition to the current position held, this individual also held the position as Associate Dean for the SOE and oversaw the SOE Annual Report process. This individual provided data on purpose, process, and experience with both a Department Chair and Associate Dean lens.

 b. Department Chair of Elementary and Secondary Education: In addition to holding this position, this individual is also the Academic Program Director for Elementary and Secondary Education. This individual provided data on purpose, process, and experience in both roles.

 c. Department Chair of Educational Support Services: In addition to holding this position, this individual is also the Academic Program Director for the School Psychology Program. This individual provided data on purpose, process, and experience in both roles.

3. SOE Program Leadership:

   a. Academic Program Director for Elementary and Secondary Education: This individual is referenced above in the Department Leadership section.

   b. Academic Program Director for School Psychology: This individual is referenced above in the Department Leadership section.

   c. Academic Program Director for Early Childhood Education: This individual provided data on purpose, process, and experience in the SOE Annual Report process.

   d. Academic Program Director for Reading Instruction: This individual provided data on purpose, process, and experience in the SOE Annual Report process.

   e. Academic Program Director for Bilingual Programs: This individual provided written data on purpose, process, and experience in the SOE Annual Report process.

   f. Academic Program Director for Catholic Education: This individual provided written data on purpose, process, and experience in the SOE Annual Report process.

   g. Assistant Academic Program Director for Educational Leadership: This individual provided written data on purpose, process, and experience in the SOE Annual Report process.

Table 1

Participants in the Study

Number of Participants	Role at St. Alexander SOE	Participation	Pseudonym
1	Administration/Leadership	Interview	AL 1
2	Administration/Leadership	Interview	AL 2
3	Administration/Leadership	Interview	AL 3
4	Administration/Leadership	Interview	AL 4
5	Department Chair	Interview	DC 1
6	Department Chair	Interview	DC 2
7	Department Chair	Interview	DC 3
8	Program Director	Interview	PD 1
9	Program Director	Interview	PD 2
10	Program Director	Written	PD 3
11	Program Director	Written	PD 4
12	Program Director	Written	PD 5

Data Collection Procedures

I submitted the Institutional Research Board before engaging with any possible

participants. After receiving IRB approval, I contacted each potential participant via e-mail. The

initial e-mail provided the potential participant with an overview of the study, an overview of the

process, the role of the potential participant, and an overview of the role of the researcher. In the

e-mail to the potential participants, I clearly stated that if an individual participated, information

would be held confidential and no individual would be identifiable.

Semi-structured interviews. After making initial contact with potential participants, I

scheduled interviews with those that met the participant criteria, were interested, and were

available to be interviewed. At the time of the scheduled interview, I again reviewed the

informed consent form with participants, provided a more detailed overview of the study, and

answered any clarifying questions or concerns before the interview took place. All interviews

were audio recorded and transcribed.

At the end of the interview, I thanked the participant for participating and again

emphasized the confidentiality of information that was shared. Transcription of the interviews

was completed shortly after each interview in order to ensure that the data were accurate. This

process aligned with what Hatch (2002) posited as an essential step, in order for researchers to

not lose the meaning and context of data that was collected.

Document analysis. I had direct access to the SOE Annual Reports. All SOE Annual

Reports are shared on an internal server. I have access to the internal server and thus was able to

easily access the documents for review. I was also able to gather the necessary budget request

documents through archived records held in the Dean's Office. The following SOE Annual

Reports were reviewed: 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011. A summary of the reports that

were reviewed is in the following table.

Table 2

Summary of SOE Annual Reports Reviewed

Type of Report	Years of Data	Number of Reports	Total Pages
Department	2008-2011	12	110
Program	2008-2011	48	Approx. 1,500

Data Collection Analysis

Data were analyzed utilizing pattern analysis. In this analysis, I was able to identify

emerging themes and patterns, using an inductive approach. Thomas (2006) stated that some

purposes of this approach include: (a) to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief

summary format; (b) to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure that the links are both transparent and defensible; (c) to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident in the text data. Using the themes and patterns that emerged, I triangulated data in order to make conclusions.

 The procedures identified by Thomas (2006) were useful in this type of qualitative analysis:

1. Prepare of raw data files (data cleaning) so that the raw data files are in a common format.

2. Close reading of text so that the researcher is familiar with its content and gains an understanding of themes and events covered in the text.

3. Create of categories from actual phrases or meanings found in the text.

4. Acknowledge overlapping coding and uncoded text.

5. Continue the revision and refinement of the category system.

Validity and Reliability

Patton (2002) articulated that the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size. This case study gathered detailed, descriptive, and rich data by using multiple methods for data collection, including semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and process analysis.

Data triangulation was used to establish the credibility of the research. In order to successfully triangulate the data found, the researcher must establish a thick descriptive set of data and use multiple data sets (Patton, 2002). To triangulate the data, I began this process by

conducting document and process analysis of the archived SOE Annual Reports. In this analysis,

I was able to identify and document emerging themes. Next, I conducted semi-structured

interviews. In the interview process and after the transcribing each interview, I was able to

identify several additional themes. By comparing themes from the document and process

analysis to the themes found in the semi-structured interviews, I was able to narrow down and

identify themes that were of significance. This process allowed me to check for congruence and

incongruence in the themes that emerged from the data.

Positionality

As stated in the opening chapter, as the researcher, I hold a senior leadership position at

the St. Alexander University School of Education. I have been in higher education for six years.

Before joining higher education, I spent several years in the PK-12 education field, primarily as a

middle school teacher and middle school administrator.

The years I spent as a middle school educator greatly influenced my beliefs regarding

education. I am a self-identified supporter of education reform efforts and believe that

educational practices must change in order for PK-12 students to gain the education needed to

succeed in today's environment. With that said, I also feel that just as PK-12 education has

needed to change, institutions of higher education must also realize that change is needed.

With that belief in mind, I have struggled to understand the resistance to change that has

been demonstrated by institutions of higher education. As a senior leader in the St. Alexander

University SOE, I have had access to the national dialogue regarding higher education and the

possible changes that may be forthcoming. In those discussions, I am usually dumbfounded by

the rhetoric of resistance versus proactive discussion on how to shape policy in the best interest

of higher education. I entered this research study with the mindset that some change is needed but not clear on what change is most appropriate.

Minimization of Bias and Trustworthiness

I believe that minimizing bias is critical in the research process. Initially, I believed that by holding a leadership position in the SOE, bias might be present in the findings. However, I have never been involved with the SOE Annual Report process, thus previous experience would not be a factor. Additionally, I determined selection criteria for individuals to participate in the semi-structured interviews. This minimized bias because it did not allow me to contact whomever I wanted. I contacted all individuals that met the criteria for participation.

A necessary element for any qualitative study is trustworthiness. I used robust methodology to ensure trustworthiness in this study. Specifically, I triangulated data with multiple sources of data. I collected data through document analysis, process analysis, and semi-structured interviews.

Research Challenges

I faced some challenges in the research process. I was allowed to engage with participants directly, given my position in the SOE. When attempting to schedule the focus groups, it became apparent that the scheduling of focus groups was a difficult task. I believed that there would need to be a minimum of three to four participants to hold a successful focus group. In attempting to schedule the Department Chairs focus group, it proved to be difficult to find a convenient time for all Department Chairs to participate. Rather than exclude those that could not participate, I held individual meetings with Department Chairs instead of holding a

focus group. This added to the richness of the data collected and minimized any potential

situation where individuals would withhold statements when in a group setting.

I faced a similar situation when attempting to schedule the focus group for the Academic

Program Directors. I decided it would be best to follow the same path as the Department Chairs.

Thus, I scheduled individual interviews with a set of Academic Program Directors.

Additionally, three Academic Program Directors requested to provide written feedback because

they were not available to be interviewed individually.

However, with these challenges, it did not impact the data collected. I believe that the

challenges proved to be beneficial because it allowed for the same data to be gathered and it

allowed for individuals to feel comfortable in speaking directly with me, without having to make

statements in the front of other individuals.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology used in this case study, which included a

description of the research questions, methodology to collect data, steps for data analysis, the site

for research, and the participants. Using multiple data sets, patterns and themes emerged, and

information was triangulated, thus ensuring a robust methodology for this study. The next

chapter will detail the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The field of higher education is facing unprecedented challenges. This study examined how the St. Alexander School of Education's existing Annual Report process impacts decision-making regarding resource allocation and how the SOE Annual Reports influence the people, programs, and SOE as a Professional Learning Community. By conducting this research, it is hoped that the findings will be able to provide guidance to colleges and universities during this volatile time.

Restatement of the Research Questions

By utilizing the Professional Learning Community as the conceptual framework the following research questions were used to address the purposes set out for this study:

1. How does the existing St. Alexander University School of Education Annual Report Process impact decision-making regarding resource allocation?

2. In a Professional Learning Community model, how can an Annual Report Process facilitate learning and improvement for the School of Education?

Summary of Key Findings

After analyzing multiple data sets, I identified the following key findings in this study: First, there is lack of shared vision and understanding regarding the purpose for the SOE Annual Reports. Second, there is a disconnect between the SOE Annual Reports and the impact that they play in the decision-making process related to resource allocation. Third, the level of dialogue and impact that the SOE Annual Reports facilitate at the department and programmatic level is mixed. Finally, there has been minimal training for the SOE Annual Report process,

which has resulted in a lack of quality in the reports. In turn, this has resulted in an overall

frustration with the process for those that are involved in the SOE Annual Report process.

Emerging Themes in the Data

The research utilized inductive pattern analysis to identify themes within the data.   Four

themes emerged after pattern analysis of the data. A detailed overview of the following themes,

with exemplars, will be presented in the following sections:

1. Lack of shared vision and understanding on purpose for the SOE Annual Reports

2. Disconnect with SOE Annual Reports and resource allocation

3. Mixed level of dialogue and impact on program improvement

4. Lack of quality, lack of training, and a frustration with the process

Lack of shared vision and understanding on purpose for the SOE Annual Reports.

As I analyzed the data from the semi-structured interviews and document analysis, a lack

of vision and understanding emerged as the first theme in the study. The most articulate

statement regarding the vision and purpose of the SOE Annual Report came from the Dean. The

Dean stated:

> The SOE Annual Report process has multiple purposes. First, the reports must be looked
>
> at as part of an entire assessment, evaluation, and feedback system. A problem that we
>
> have had is that some individuals feel that they are 'assessed to death' and thus do not
>
> provide the thought necessary for each separate assessment report. The SOE Annual
>
> Report needs to be able to address multiple purposes, with the hope of this report being
>
> able to unite all assessment reports. As part of this system, individuals in the SOE need

to be thoughtful in their reflection on program quality. SOE faculty and staff must also use data, in a regular way, to determine the future direction of a program.

Another purpose for the SOE Annual Report is to inform the budget request and decision-making process. This should all be systematic and based on data. As a School of Education, we must use data to drive decisions—sometimes this will mean reallocating resources and sometimes it will mean adding new positions. But, it must be based on data. The SOE Annual Report process should give us the necessary data to make these decisions.

Another member from the administration and leadership, AL 3, framed the purpose in the following way: "The reports should be a systematic review of our programs, utilizing data, in order to gain an understanding of what students learn throughout the program. We then need to use these reports for resource allocation."

Even though those two statements have similar elements, the remaining data tell a much different story. First and foremost, before looking at what other participants have said regarding purpose, it is important to detail the cover sheet/instructions for the SOE Annual Report. The coversheet/instructions for the SOE Annual Report begins with outlining logistical due dates and instructions for access. The instructions then outline the following areas for completion: (a) accomplishments & data driven improvements, (b) faculty and staff demographics, (c) department strengths, (d) goals for next year, (e) recommendations for change, (f) chair's summary, (g) supporting documentation.   Each of the sections outlined in the instruction sheet give detailed expectations and prompts. However, it is significant to note that nowhere in the instructions does it detail an overall purpose or vision for the SOE Annual Report process.

With no written purpose or vision outlined in the SOE Annual Report process instruction sheet, the myriad of statements made by the study participants regarding the purpose or vision of the report are not a surprise. One participant that holds an administrative and leadership position, AL 4, articulated the issue of purpose in the following way:

> The SOE Annual Reports began with an accreditation purpose. We needed to demonstrate a system where our programs reviewed data in a systematic way. Then it morphed into other things. Then we wanted to see how we could use this data to complete other reports. Really…every year this report has morphed. I think that is part of the problem. Are we attempting to satisfy too many needs with this report and thus it has lost its focus?

A statement from a department chair, DC 2 took this notion one step further with the following statement:

> I don't think there is a shared purpose for the SOE Annual Report. We've been doing this now for four years and every year I get the same questions, "What is the purpose of this? Why are we doing these reports?" We really need to get to a place where everyone understands why we are doing this so that we can have some true dialogue.

Another department chair, DC 3, emphasized, "I don't think people understand the purpose." At the next level, the Academic Program Directors, this is even more evident. One Academic Program Director, PD 4 stated:

> In its current iteration, the annual report serves little purpose for my program or decisions made across the department (that I am privy to, at least). I don't hear reference made to Annual Reports in department meetings, or in relationship to the allocation of resources.

Two additional Academic Program Directors, PD 2 and PD 1, supported this sentiment with the following statements:

I have been told that the SOE Annual Reports are supposed to have budgetary implications. However, I don't see that link much at the program level. Most of my report is a summary of the work of the program but I don't see a link with what the report asks to budget. It may impact budget but it's not something that is clearly communicated back to me. So, I don't really understand the purpose. (PD 2)

The purpose of the report has never been communicated to me. So, to be completely honest about this, I don't see a purpose to the reports. I feel they are just another task that needs to be done. Another checkbox… It could be for a paper trail for decisions made regarding resources and/or accreditation purposes. (PD 1)

Disconnect with SOE Annual Reports and resource allocation. The second theme that emerged in this study involved the disconnect between the SOE Annual Reports and the decisions related to resource allocation. A member of the administration and leadership, AL 1, articulated that one purpose of the report is to inform decisions related to resource allocation. However, the individual stated that this purpose has not been met because of a misalignment with the timeline of when the SOE Annual Reports are turned in and the timeline of when budget requests need to be submitted. The following statement summarizes these thoughts:

One problem that we have had is that our timelines do not align. The first step that will allow us to the data from these reports in a thoughtful way is to ensure that the timelines

align. We need the data from these reports before the budget request process begins,

typically in late summer.

These reports will allow us to standardize a budget cycle in order to allow the

reports to be used for decision-making. This will also allow for long term and mid-range

planning, so that we can plan and prioritize. This planning to needs to be thoughtful and

based on data.

Before the SOE Annual Report process, requests were "wish-lists" but they may

not have been linked to data based needs. Our economic model and this new economic

climate does not allow for that anymore. We need to be thoughtful and any requests need

to be made based on data.

 Another individual from the administration and leadership, AL 2, gave a clearer reality

versus the potential of what the reports could be. This individual stated:

I have no involvement with the SOE Annual Report process. I have not used the data

from the reports to make decisions related to resource allocation. I have never read an

annual report from any department. However, with that said, I believe the concept is

positive, but it comes down to implementation. This process can be used in a positive

way where we can truly use the data to make thoughtful decisions. I would be interested

in seeing head-count, ratio of faculty to students, etc. However, I don't think that

reviewing this annually for decisions related to budget would be a good idea. In order to

make thoughtful decisions, we need to be able to see trends. Maybe we could have an

abbreviated annual report process every year. Then every three years have a full report

so that true planning could take place. It would be even better if we did this every five

years, this would take into account if we had a bad year. Five years is really the point where you're able to identify trends and make decisions.

In regards to timing of the reports, one department chair, DC 2, reiterated the point by stating, " The process could be positive because we need to review the data, however, the timing does not work. It seems like it's a year off."

One department chair, DC 1, took this one step further by stating that there is no feedback in this part of the process thus it creates a situation where there is no connection between the SOE Annual Reports and decision making related to resource allocation. The following statement emphasizes this point:

Many individuals do not see any link. The reality is that these reports are not read and they don't inform decision-making. I don't think the current format lends itself to this. The timing has been a struggle and does not lend itself so that the reports could inform budget decision-making. The template could change to allow for this to be clearer. However, no feedback has ever been given. The truth is that the product is not being used. Maybe we should do this every other year.

Another department chair, DC 3, emphatically stated:

These reports could be something. But the reality is that we never receive feedback. We make requests and then never hear back. This is extremely frustrating. It makes it seem like we're wasting our time doing these reports. Why am I going to put effort into these reports when a decision is going to be made that goes in another direction?

Don't get me wrong…I know and I understand that everything requested cannot

be funded. But, when we request something, then see something else funded, and there

was no communication to why, it adds to the frustration. We simply need to get feedback

on why something else was funded. Tell us why "A", "B", or "C" was funded and share

which data informed that decision. If we're all supposed to use data to make decisions,

shouldn't the data used to make a decision be shared?

Participants also expressed the question of whether the right data was being used for this

budget request process. One Academic Program Director, PD 4, stated, "Resources are

requested in connection with other data that is often omitted from Annual Reports". Another

program director, PD 2, stated, "The data in the reports do not really lend itself to make requests.

I don't really have a need. But, I'm unclear of what I could be asking for."

Another Academic Program Director, PD 1, emphasized this point by stating:

The system is not bi-directional. The data and this system do not really allow us to put

forward requests. The data does not align and show that I may need program brochures.

Will the number of students in my program and their outcomes show me that I need

program brochures? Therefore, how can I make a request based on data if the data is not

there? I am also unclear on what programs may need. Looking at my program versus a

program with larger numbers, how do I know what they have and is that something that I

need?

The statements of frustration made by participants in the above areas are supported by

additional data found in document analysis. First, in reviewing the template and instructions for

the SOE Annual Report, there is no section that is clearly identified as a "budget/resource request"

section. Instead, the only budgetary reference is hidden within the "Goals for Next Year" section of the SOE Annual Report instruction sheet. Within that section, a description of the following areas is asked for: (a) department goals for next year, (b) data that prompted the goal, (c) implementation plan, including implementation date and budgetary needs, and (d) the alphanumeric unit proficiency and numeric NCATE standard that the goal is mapped to. Again, there is no section that emphasizes budget request in the instruction sheet.

The second area of data that supports the disconnect between the SOE Annual Reports is based on the data found in the budgetary requests made by the SOE in 2009, 2010, and 2011. In 2009, the SOE requested two new faculty positions and one alumni staff position. The faculty positions were not identified for any specific program or department in the budget request.   In 2010, the SOE requested one new faculty position. The position was designated for any program or department in the budget request. In 2011, the SOE requested approval to fund one faculty position, one Associate Dean Position, a position for the Executive Director in the Center for Catholic Education, and funding for costs related to the development of the Online Master's in Urban Education program.

 In reviewing the budget requests for these years, the faculty positions were requested by showing data that reflected the need to improve the full-time tenure line faculty to student ratio. However, after reviewing the archived SOE Annual Reports it is not clear that the requests were made based off the data found in the SOE Annual Reports. If the requests were indeed made based off the data found in the SOE Annual Reports, this was not communicated to those that submitted the SOE Annual Reports.

Mixed level of dialogue and impact on program improvement. The third finding of this study demonstrated that the SOE Annual Report process facilitated a mixed level of dialogue and impact on program improvement. In addition to the need to impact decisions related to resource allocation, as articulated previously, an additional goal for the SOE Annual Reports is to lead to dialogue and discussion for programmatic improvement. When asked if the SOE Annual Report accomplished this, one participant from the administration and leadership stated, AL 3, "The SOE Annual Reports definitely meet this goal. The structure allows us to address our accreditation needs."

However, the dialogue begins to change at the Department Chair level. One Department Chair, DL 2, stated the following:

Dialogue within programs for program improvement is inconsistent. We need to and should be having dialogue. We need individuals in the department to own our programs. In addition, we should involve our part-time faculty. However, this is inconsistent. Some programs do not engage part-time faculty, even when time is allotted for this at the all-faculty meeting.

The dialogue was also mixed at the programmatic level. One Academic Program Director, PD 5, stated:

The SOE Annual Report process directly impacts learning because it allows individual programs to engage in the cycle of evaluation for continuous improvement on a yearly basis. From this process, our annual goals are set and our plan of action is developed. Strengthening our individual programs definitely results in increased improvement across the SOE as well.

Two additional Academic Program Directors, PD 3 and PD 2, offered a different take. The two following statements contribute to the mixed perception on program impact:

The annual report does facilitate dialogue to an extent. In my department we do present the findings of the annual report and goals to the department. However, I don't think the dialogue impacts the program or decisions that need to be made at a program level.

In the beginning I didn't see this. I saw this as unnecessary. However, now I appreciate this process. I do engage my department chair on ideas on what should be done for the program. However, I don't recall reviewing the department report. It might have been shared, but I really don't remember.

The last statement by a member of the administration and leadership, AL 4, summarizes the mixed impact that the SOE Annual Report has in promoting dialogue for program improvement. This individual stated:

Yes, I am aware that the SOE Annual Report process facilitates dialogue. I receive many questions on how the report impacts decisions. So, I know that it creates dialogue in some way. However, I'm not sure if the dialogue produced is actually used for program improvement or any other positive way.

Lack of quality, lack of training, and a frustration with the process. The fourth key finding involved the quality, training, and experience of the reports. This emerged as an area of focus before engaging participants in interviews. As I analyzed the archived SOE Annual Reports, it became apparent that quality was an issue. If a section called for analysis, it was not uncommon to see incomplete sections or sections completed with one sentence. As noted

previously, the documents reviewed showed a lack of vision, thus the reports were disconnected and disjointed. Additionally, due to the lack of quality, a full and robust document analysis was not possible due to the documents being so disjointed.

As I engaged with participants in the interview process, the issue of quality became more complex. The difference became more apparent between stakeholder groups. One individual, speaking from the lens of the administration and leadership, AL 3, articulated the issue of quality in the following way:

The products themselves have not been of high quality. I would estimate that more than half of them are of low quality. First, there is a layer of sloppiness, where individuals simply ignore the prompt. Second, there is a lack of thoughtfulness. It's amazing on how people are not embarrassed on what they turn in.

Building off this statement, another individual from the administration and leadership, AL 4, stated:

I hear that individuals feel that these reports are not used in any real way, thus many don't put real effort into this process. Departments and programs really struggle. Many individuals simply don't show that they synthesize and analyze information. What happens is that they simply cut and paste the information provided by programs. I think that some individuals simply do not care about assessment or care about using data to inform programmatic decisions. It is really obvious which reports do not have quality…I can't identify one report as stellar.

Department Chairs and Academic Program Directors gave a different perspective than those in administration and leadership. One Department Chair shared that a sense of training or guidance was needed. This Department Chair, DC 2, stated:

> The Department Chair report seems very cut and paste from Program Reports. I don't really understand what these reports should say. I ask myself, "Is that what we're supposed to do?" I don't think the directors know what they really should be doing either. There is lot's of copying and pasting from previous years.

Two Academic Program Directors gave short but significant statements. PD 2 stated, "It would really be nice to have some of training on what is expected." PD 1 stated, "I don't know what I really should ask for. Some guidance would be appreciated."

A third Academic Program Director, PD 3, supported these statements by articulating, "I've never received any guidance/training/background on the purpose of the annual report and how to best write it. The first one I wrote, I looked at a previous version to guide me. That's all the background I had."

Issues of quality have also contributed to an overall negative attitude toward the SOE Annual Report process. One Academic Program Director, PD 4, explained that the process could change in the following way:

> I believe Annual Reports should actually be completed every two or three years so as to allow for a *meaningful* examination of longitudinal data. It would also enhance their usefulness as they would be newly written and not something we struggle to make sound unique from year to year.

An additional Academic Program Director, PD 3, supported and detailed this sentiment by stating:

I wonder if it's necessary to do the report every year. Could there be a way to do the report maybe every three years, with program updates provided each year? So the entire report is not done every year, but that there's a way to report program changes if it applies. I think data should still be looked at each year, however if the data looks the same, then the report isn't going to look different.

The statements made by Academic Program Directors may explain why those in administration and leadership have also been frustrated with the SOE Annual Report process. Speaking from the lens of an administrator and leader, AL 4 detailed the sense of frustration in the following way:

This was a pretty negative experience. It took lots of time and energy. Sometimes we would have staff go and ask the program director the questions because what was submitted was of such low quality. Many had the mindset of 'how to get this done'. But, let's take a step back…why would they want to do this? There has never been any feedback provided.

Another member from the administration and leadership, AL 3, emphasized the frustrations with this process by stating:

Many feel that this is just another thing that one needs to do. Just one of many tasks. Many ask, 'What do you want me to put in this section?'… instead of authentically reviewing data and submitting the report based on true analysis. I would say that this is true for half to majority of those that have submitted the reports.

Even though the data reflects a lack of quality, which may be due to a lack of training, one participant from the administration and leadership emphasized a need to get beyond this and the need to own the SOE Annual Report process as a School of Education. Specifically, AL 1 stated:

> I need the faculty and staff to take it seriously. This cannot be lip service. Everyone involved, including the senior leadership needs to take this seriously. However, I cannot micromanage this process. I need the faculty, staff, and others in leadership roles to lead and manage this process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the findings of this study. I attempted to address multiple purposes, including examining how the St. Alexander School of Education's existing Annual Report process impacts decision-making regarding resource allocation; examining of how the information provided in the SOE Annual Reports influence the people, programs, and SOE as Professional Learning Community; and finally attempting to contribute to the literature base in the areas of university decision-making related to resource allocation and in Professional Learning Community examples for higher education.

Using inductive pattern analysis, I found the following key findings: (a) there is a lack of vision and understanding on purpose for the SOE Annual Reports; (b) there is a disconnect with SOE Annual Reports and resource allocation; (c) there is a mixed level of dialogue and impact on program improvement; and (d) there is a lack of quality, lack of training, and a frustration with the SOE Annual Report process. The findings presented in this chapter will be explored

further in Chapter five. Additionally, recommendations for the St. Alexander University School

of Education will be made in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

Colleges and universities are facing unseen challenges. With new pressures by the federal government, compounded with unprecedented financial challenges, colleges and universities will need to put new processes in place to address these challenges. The St. Alexander University School of Education has implemented the SOE Annual Report process as a way to address these challenges and as a way to systematically review programs. The SOE Annual Report process was the focus for this study. The first purpose of this study was to examine how the St. Alexander School of Education's existing Annual Report process impacts decision-making regarding resource allocation. The second purpose of this study was to examine how the information provided in the SOE Annual Reports influences the people, programs, and SOE as a Professional Learning Community. The last purpose of this study was to contribute to the literature base in the areas of university decision-making related to resource allocation and in Professional Learning Community examples for higher education.

Reflection on the Data

The St. Alexander School of Education is at a critical juncture. With colleges and universities facing unseen challenges, the St. Alexander SOE will need to take steps to ensure long-term viability. The SOE Annual Report process was put in place to influence strategic decisions related to resource allocation and to influence decisions related to programmatic improvement. After analyzing multiple data sets, I identified the following key findings in this study: First, there is a lack of shared vision and understanding regarding the purpose for the

SOE Annual Reports. Second, there is a disconnect between the SOE Annual Reports and the

impact that they play in the decision-making process related to resource allocation. Third, the

level of dialogue and impact that the SOE Annual Reports facilitates at the department and

programmatic level is mixed. Finally, there has been minimal training for the SOE Annual

Report process, which has resulted in a lack of quality in the reports. In turn, this has resulted in

an overall frustrating experience for those that are involved in the SOE Annual Report process.

A discussion of the findings will be explored in the following sections.

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Discussion of the Findings and Relationship to the PLC

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As stated in the opening chapter, the St. Alexander School of Education has made the

strategic decision to move forward and implement the Professional Learning Community model.

If the PLC will be a point of emphasis as the SOE moves forward, elements of the PLC must be

incorporated when discussing the findings in this chapter. The St. Alexander SOE framed their

PLC with the framework provided by Hall and Hord (2001). The elements for a PLC include:

(a) shared values and vision, (b) collective learning and application, (c) supportive and shared

leadership, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice. These elements will be

explored as I discuss the findings and addresses the research questions in this chapter.

Research Question 1: How does the existing St. Alexander University School of Education

Annual Report Process Impact Decision-Making Regarding Resource Allocation?

A member from the SOE administration and leadership, AL 1, indicated that one purpose

of the SOE Annual Report is to "inform the budget request and decision-making process. This

should all be systematic and based on data." However, another member, AL 4, indicated that

this purpose might be lost because the report may be trying to accomplish too many goals versus

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successfully accomplishing one goal. This individual stated, "…every year this report has morphed. I think that is part of the problem. Are we attempting to satisfy too many needs with this report and thus it has lost its focus?"

The data in this study demonstrated that there was a clear disconnect in purpose for the SOE Annual Reports. This finding is extremely troublesome. Without an understanding on the purpose of the SOE Annual Report, this also points to a lack of vision. In a PLC, the vision and purpose are the foundation for all work in the organization (Hall & Hord, 2001). Without clarity, the PLC will lack results (Cranston, 2009).

The Dean outlined the importance of the SOE Annual Report process with the following statement:

> I need the faculty and staff to take it seriously. This cannot be lip service. Everyone involved, including the senior leadership needs to take this seriously. However, I cannot micromanage this process. I need the faculty, staff, and others in leadership roles to lead and manage this process.

As the overall leader, the Dean set a compelling vision for the Annual Report process and then delegated the implementation of the process to others. There was no feedback loop, however, whereby the Dean regularly and systematically was apprised of the successes and failures of the SOE Annual Report initiative. It is clear that members of the Dean's leadership staff simply got too entrenched in the process, and thus presented the SOE Annual Report process in a way that was disconnected from the original vision that was articulated by the Dean. Over a period of only a few years, the initiative moved from being visionary and bold to being something to check off of a to-do list.

With a lack of clarity on purpose and vision for the SOE Annual Reports, it is no surprise that the data found in this study clearly indicated that there was minimal to zero impact that the SOE Annual Report process has had on decision-making regarding resource allocation. First and foremost, when reviewing the budgetary requests submitted by the SOE in the years of study and comparing that with what was requested in the archived SOE Annual Reports, there is no clear link between what was submitted and what was requested. Second, when reviewing the instructional sheets to complete the SOE Annual Report, the "budgetary request" section was not an individual or emphasized section. Rather, the "budgetary request" was embedded in another section of the report. This may have made sense during the creation of the instructions and template for the SOE Annual Report. However, the impact and message that it portrays is that the "budgetary request" is really not a point of emphasis. By deemphasizing this element, one should not be surprised if the requests made are not thoughtful or based on data.

The following statement, by an individual that is involved with the budget process, AL 2, concretizes the finding that the SOE Annual Report process has zero to minimal impact on decision-making related to resource allocation: "I have no involvement with the SOE Annual Report process. I have not used the data from the reports to make decisions related to resource allocation. I have never read an annual report from any department."

Multiple participants in the study shared frustration when speaking about budget requests. The overwhelming majority stated that nobody has ever received feedback from what was submitted in the SOE Annual Report. Having zero feedback provided is also extremely troubling because it directly contradicts with a foundational element of a successful PLC, supportive and shared leadership (Hall & Hord, 2001). Lawrence and Ott (2012) stated that

when faculty believe collegial decision-making is valued and rewarded and when professional authority is recognized, they are more likely to engage in governance activities. The findings show that leadership has not been shared in this area. By not incorporating feedback into the budget request process and by not sharing leadership, the build up of frustration by those that submit the SOE Annual Report has neared a point that may not be repairable.

To answer the first research question directly, I found that the SOE Annual Report process does not impact decisions related to resource allocation. This is due to a lack of shared purpose and vision, lack of use, and lack of feedback in the SOE Annual Report process. The findings should prompt immediate attention and action if the St. Alexander SOE is to move forward as a successful Professional Learning Community.

Research Question 2: In a Professional Learning Community Model, how can an Annual Report Process Facilitate Learning and Improvement for the School of Education?

The St. Alexander University SOE must demonstrate collective learning and application and shared personal practice if it wishes to become a PLC that promotes learning and improvement (Hall & Hord, 2001). When addressing this research question, the findings in this study are mixed. Two themes emerged from analyzing the data. The first theme demonstrated that there is a mixed level of dialogue regarding programmatic improvement. The second theme found that there has been a lack of quality and a lack of training seen in the SOE Annual Report process, which has equated to an overall negative experience for those involved.

In order to facilitate learning and improvement, processes that facilitate dialogue between colleagues must be put in place. The findings in this area for the St. Alexander SOE are mixed. Some participants indicated that the SOE Annual Report process directly impacts learning and

improvement. One participant, PD 5, specifically stated: "The SOE Annual Report process directly impacts learning because it allows individual programs to engage in the cycle of evaluation for continuous improvement on a yearly basis." This statement reflects one positive element of a PLC being implemented. Hall and Hord (2001) articulated that in a PLC, individuals within the organization must work collaboratively, where reflective dialogue forces debate about what is important, thus provides the community with opportunities for learning from and with each other. This environment thus promotes the sharing of new ideas and shared decision-making. The data that reflects this element of a PLC is visible in some areas in the SOE.

However, another participant detailed how the results of this process are mixed between programs. This participant, DC 2, stated that some programs do this well, but some programs do not engage all faculty that are associated with the program. If not all faculty are engaged, it does not allow for peers to provide feedback and assistance. This practice contradicts with a needed element of a PLC: shared personal practice. Hall and Hord (2001) indicated that this process may be difficult because of the time needed to plan for this. However, organizations must be willing to commit to the time needed for this to be successful. Even though timing may be difficult, compounded with the fact that PLC elements are not commonly found in university settings, there is evidence that this can take place—especially for programs within departments. Grierson et al. (2012) posited that collaborative self-study can provide a vehicle to deepen teacher educators' understandings of their practices, and also of themselves, their colleagues, their candidates, and their program.

The elements of collective learning and shared practice point to the importance of collegiality between colleagues. Colleagues must be able to hold thoughtful dialogue and

demonstrate vulnerability when examining programs. If individuals cannot do this, a PLC cannot be successfully implemented. The findings in this study indicate that there has been built-up frustration for those involved in the SOE Annual Report process. This frustration may impact individuals in the SOE to be able to authentically engage in the process of collective learning and shared practice. Additionally, even though the SOE Annual Report process allows for feedback and dialogue to take place, the findings demonstrate that no feedback has ever been given. This lack of feedback demonstrates that a culture of collective learning and shared practice is not fully in place. If the St. Alexander SOE wishes to become a successful PLC, individuals must be able to provide and receive feedback in a safe environment.

The findings in this study, in regards to this research question, are mixed. Some data reflects that some parts of the SOE are successfully utilizing the SOE Annual Report process for learning and improvement. However, the data also indicates that this is not seen throughout the SOE. Steps will need to be taken in order for the SOE Annual Report process to impact learning and improvement for all areas within the SOE and to prevent individuals from being frustrated in this process.

Significance of the Findings

The findings found in this study are extremely significant to the St. Alexander University School of Education. Before addressing the significance, it is important to recognize the local context. The St. Alexander University SOE recently submitted a draft strategic plan that prioritizes SOE initiatives for the next eight years. Within the strategic planning process, the SOE agreed to take steps to become a Professional Learning Community. However, making this decision takes thought and methodical steps before a PLC is fully implemented.

The SOE Annual Report process was the primary focus of this study. Both research questions focused on different elements of the SOE Annual Report process. When discussing the findings of this study, it is evident that the SOE Annual Report process is not fulfilling the purpose or multiple purposes that it has been set out to accomplish. This realization is very timely for the SOE.

The reason that this study is significant and timely to the SOE is due to the fact that the SOE will soon begin its next steps toward implementing the next SOE Strategic Plan. If the SOE has multiple expectations of the SOE Annual Report, it is better to acknowledge that the SOE Annual Report process is not fulfilling expectations sooner rather than later. The SOE Annual Report takes a significant amount of time and effort of each individual involved in the process. If the SOE Annual Report is not fulfilling the purposes it has, much of that time and effort could be used in more productive ways, and thus would minimize the negative attitude toward the SOE Annual Report.

It is important to note that there are elements of the reporting process that have shown value. Rather than departing from the entire SOE Annual Report process, steps can be taken to reshape the SOE Annual Report so that it contributes to the SOE becoming a Professional Learning Community. These recommendations will be explored in the "recommendation" section of this chapter.

Recommendations for the St. Alexander School of Education

The findings of this study indicate that significant change to the SOE Annual Report process must be made if the reporting process is going to be meaningful. I will make recommendations that are grounded in both the elements of the Professional Learning

Community model and in the elements outlined in the Vision, Implementation, and Assessment (VIA) model for organizational change.

SOE Annual Report 2.0: A New Vision and Purpose

The findings of this study indicated that there is no shared vision or purpose for the SOE Annual Report. However, the literature emphasizes that the vision and purpose are the most critical elements in both the Professional Learning Community model and in the VIA model for organizational change. Hall and Hord (2001) posited that the vision and purpose are the foundation for all work in the organization. McCullough et al. (2008) posited that all stakeholders must agree on what they hope to gain by implementing a new program or change. By looking at what was submitted in the draft SOE Strategic Plan, it is clear that the SOE, as a whole, has agreed to implement the PLC model.

Given that the SOE Annual Report process has demonstrated a clear lack of shared vision and purpose, efforts must be taken to refocus and redevelop a shared vision and purpose. First, I recommend that it is important for those in leadership to acknowledge that the SOE Annual Report process has not met the goals that it was set out to accomplish. I also recommend that this public acknowledgement must be made in away that is emphasized, in order for all faculty and staff to understand that the leadership of the SOE takes responsibility for the disconnect seen in the SOE Annual Report process. By acknowledging this in a public manner, the faculty and staff of the SOE will be able to recognize the importance of the SOE Annual Report Process.

Two elements of a successful PLC are relevant in this first step of reshaping the SOE Annual Report. The two elements include: (a) shared values and vision and (b) supportive and shared leadership. After acknowledging that the SOE Annual Reports have not met the goals

that have been set, the leadership must take steps of reemphasizing the importance and vision of the SOE Annual Report process. The national context, both in federal policy and in fiscal challenges, should be the grounding foundation when the leadership reshapes the vision and purpose for the SOE Annual Report process. By emphasizing, in the vision, that the SOE must be strategic with decisions related to resource allocation, the SOE faculty and staff will gain a clearer understanding on what role the SOE Annual Report process plays in the budget decision-making process.

However, even though resource allocation is a fundamental component of the new vision and purpose, it is important for the SOE leadership to emphasize the second purpose of the SOE Annual Report. That second purpose will need to ensure that SOE processes are in place that will promote dialogue for the overall assessment, learning, and improvement for the SOE. This second element that emphasizes dialogue is critical, if the SOE is to become a successful PLC. It is important to note that the SOE must be thoughtful when moving forward in this area. Specifically, it must be noted that the PLC model in PK-12 education focuses on using student data to improve student learning. Many times, these data come from standardized testing data. Given that higher education does not have standardized data to pull from, the SOE must be thoughtful and innovative in deciding what to use to ground the PLC conversations related to the Annual Report. One recommendation is for the SOE to use data that come from Signature Assignments housed in the Departments and Programs. This could be the initial source of data that can drive discussions at the program, department, and school-wide levels.

After reestablishing a shared vision for the SOE Annual Report process, it is important for the St. Alexander SOE to take steps to reinforce and in some cases, introduce the vision to

members of the SOE community. One way to accomplish this is by assuring that an introductory

statement that outlines the purpose and vision is included in the instruction sheets for the SOE

Annual Report. In addition, with the number of changes taking place in the SOE, it is important

to take into account faculty and staff turnover. With natural turnover taken into consideration,

there is a need to reintroduce, teach, and explain the vision, purpose, and process of the SOE

Annual Report each year.

Implementation of the New SOE Annual Report Process

The second component of the VIA model is the implementation plan (McCullough et al.,

2008). McCullough et al. stated that careful steps must be identified when implementing a new

process or change. I recommend careful consideration in the following areas: timeline of the

reporting process, role of those in leadership, role of feedback in the SOE Annual Report

process, a new annual reporting cycle, and a plan for assessment.

Access of the report. Ease of access to the needed materials should be a priority, if the

SOE Annual Reports are to be revived. As the researcher in this study, it was easy for me to

access materials via a PC computer. However, when attempting to access the materials from my

Apple laptop, the materials were no longer easy to access. When inquiring on how to access the

materials from my Apple device, I was instructed that I needed to manually input the name of the

shared drive. The shared drive name and the characters associated with it are not easy to

remember. In the SOE, faculty and staff use both Apple and PC products. Given this reality, the

SOE should explore technology that can store and give access to the SOE Annual Report

materials no matter which platform an individual is on. By making access easy and

straightforward, it is more likely that the SOE Annual Reports will be integrated into the life of the SOE.

Training. It has been assumed that all members of the SOE community know how to analyze data and prepare a well thought out SOE Annual Report. However, the findings show otherwise. If significant effort is going into reestablishing a shared vision, it is also an opportune time to share expectations and provide training for the SOE Annual Report. Training should be provided yearly. If an individual area has demonstrated the ability to submit a quality report, that individual area may not need to attend the trainings. Conversely, if individual areas have not demonstrated the ability to submit a quality report, mandatory trainings for those respective areas should be put in place. By implementing training sessions, it will not allow individuals to say that expectations for the SOE Annual Report are unclear.

Timeline of the SOE Annual Report. The findings of the study indicated that there was a disconnect with the timeline of when the SOE Annual Reports are submitted compared to the time that budget requests are made. If the SOE Annual Reports are to meet one of the primary purposes, influencing decisions related to budget, the timeline for budget requests must be the starting point. The budget request process has begun in later summer for the past three years. It is a safe assumption that this should be the timeframe that is in mind when determining when the SOE Annual Reports should be submitted. To ensure that the data from the SOE Annual Reports are available by later summer, one recommendation is to change the due dates of the SOE Annual Reports from October to May. If this is done, the reporting timeframe may need to be a calendar year versus an academic year. Before making this change, the reporting timelines of other significant reports should be taken into consideration.

Abbreviated reports. In this study, some Academic Program Directors stated that the

data does not change significantly from year to year, which adds to their frustration of doing a

pointless exercise each year. One way to respond to this would be to establish a data baseline,

whereby if the data does not change beyond set parameters, then only an abbreviated report is

due for that year. For example, if the faculty to student ratio did not change by more than five

percent, there may not be a need to submit a report that would look almost identical to the

previous year. This would save time for those involved in this process and would also

emphasize the significance of full reports submitted in following years. The baseline data to

qualify a program or department for an abbreviated report should be established and agreed upon

by all key stakeholders—Academic Program Directors, Department Chairs, and SOE

Administration and Leadership.

Role of leadership. I emphatically recommend that the leadership and administration

must take an active role in the new SOE Annual Report process. The findings of the study

indicate that not all members of the administration and leadership are a part of this process.

Given the importance of the vision and purpose of the SOE Annual Report, if the leadership is

not involved, the SOE Annual Report process will continue to have minimal impact in the SOE.

The leadership must own this process, just as all faculty and staff needs to own this process. One

tangible recommendation is to create a process where different groups within the SOE

systematically review the SOE Annual Reports each year. The SOE has multiple leadership

groups where this would be appropriate. The groups include: (a) Dean's Cabinet; (b) SOE

Leadership Council; (c) Department Chairs; and (d) Academic Program Directors. I recommend

that all groups should be involved with the reading and providing of feedback in the SOE Annual

Report process. Feedback is an essential element if an organization is going to be a PLC.   The role that feedback should play in the SOE Annual Report process will be explored in the following section.

Role of feedback in the SOE Annual Report. The findings of this study indicated that there was minimal feedback in the SOE Annual Report process. Participants in this study indicated that the lack of feedback is the key element to why frustration has been built toward the SOE Annual Report process. I recommend that feedback needs to be provided at every level. The sharing of feedback will reflect the concept of collective learning and application, an essential element of the PLC.   I will detail recommendations for feedback in the following paragraphs.

In addition to the findings of the study indicating that there is a lack of feedback, the findings also indicated that there was a lack of quality seen in the reports. However, I believe that these two findings contribute to one another. If an individual has never received feedback in the SOE Annual Report process, why would that individual put effort into the process? This fact supports my recommendation that feedback must be given if the SOE Annual Report process is going to be seen as a valued process in the SOE.

Additionally, if the SOE is going to become a successful PLC, honest and thoughtful dialogue and feedback need to take place at all levels. This dialogue and feedback must not shy away from holding individuals accountable if reports reflect low quality. If this is the case, I recommend that someone in a leadership role must clearly state this fact and share that if a report does not reflect high quality analysis, that program and department are not eligible for any

resources in the forthcoming year. This direct feedback is needed if individuals are to take the

SOE Annual Report process seriously.

Conversely, if individual SOE Annual Reports reflect thoughtful analysis, positive

feedback must be made. The positive reinforcement will indicate two things to those involved:

(a) Individuals are actually reading and reflecting on the reports submitted and (b) Those in

leadership recognize the positive individual efforts being made. Ideally, with the appropriate

positive reinforcement, the quality of the SOE Annual Reports will improve.

Finally, it is critical that when budget requests submitted on behalf of the SOE are made,

these budget requests should be shared with the entire SOE. If the SOE leadership expects the

SOE Annual Report process to influence decision-making, communication is critical so that

those involved do not see this process as a waste of energy. I recommend that a member from

the administration and leadership should share what budget request was submitted each budget

year. This presentation should be open to all members of the SOE. In the presentation, the

rationale for the requests should be shared, in addition to the data used to make the decisions.

This, ideally, should tie to the data submitted in the SOE Annual Reports. By making this link, it

will visibly reinforce that the SOE Annual Reports do indeed influence the budget process. I

recognize that some years may require requests to be made that do not align with what is

submitted in the SOE Annual Reports. I believe that this is acceptable, as long as the rationale

for the requests are based on data and shared publically, thus emphasizing a element of the PLC,

shared and distributed leadership.

SOE Annual Report cycle. I propose the following cycle for the SOE Annual Report

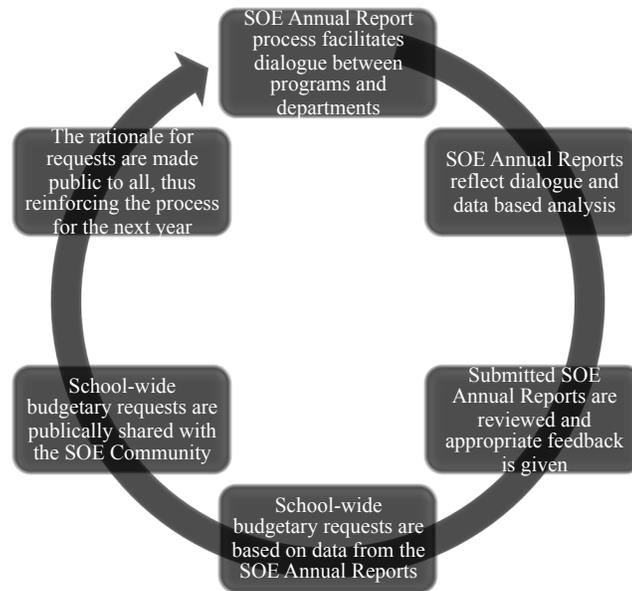process to ensure alignment with the elements of a successful PLC:

Figure 1. Proposed cycle for SOE Annual Report process. This figure illustrates a proposed
cycle for the SOE Annual Report process to ensure alignment with a Professional Learning
Community model.

Assessment

The last element in the VIA model is assessment. McCullough et al. (2008) stated that a

plan to assess or analyze a new process or program is vital. I recommend that three groups take

ownership of the assessment of the PLC and SOE Annual Report process. I recommend that the

Dean's Cabinet, the SOE Leadership Council, and the SOE Assessment and Accreditation

committee take ownership of these processes and develop a plan to assess the success of both the

new PLC and the new SOE Annual Report process.

Implications

The St. Alexander University School of Education must not only be aware of the local context. The national context also plays a significant role within this study. First, it is important to restate the new era of federal accountability that will be forthcoming to colleges and universities in the United States. In the President's *Plan for a Strong Middle Class and a Strong America* (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013), the President spoke to holding colleges and universities accountable for cost, value, and quality. Colleges and universities must be aware of the possibility that there will be new federal policy that holds colleges and universities accountable for the areas that the President has spoken to.

The findings and recommendations of this study will have implications for the field, specifically other colleges and universities that are grappling with this new era of accountability that is being set by the federal government. The truth is that all colleges and universities should be grappling with these new challenges. However, not all are. The fact that some colleges and universities are oblivious to these new challenges emphasizes the point that some change is needed in higher education. The findings and recommendations of this study will allow other colleges and universities that are grappling with these new challenges to make changes or take action based on the lessons learned in this study. Additionally, since the recommendations will be made through the lens of the elements of a Professional Learning Community, colleges and universities will be able to see possible steps of implementing a PLC to address the new challenges of today.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given the local and national implications of this research study, I recommend future research in multiple areas. First, I recommend that follow-up research take place at the St. Alexander SOE. The follow-up research should explore both the new SOE Annual Report process and the success of the implementation of the PLC model at the St. Alexander SOE. Second, if any other institution implements a PLC and Annual Report process based on the findings in this study, I recommend studying the commonalities between the different institutions to improve practice. Third, research at the policy level is also a consideration. As policy continues to develop in the new era of accountability, researching the impact of reporting and accountability processes to navigate these new challenges is an area that will need to be researched.

Limitations

The focus of the study was on the St. Alexander University SOE Annual Report process. All elements of the findings within the study may not be generalizable to other schools and colleges. Additionally, the elements from a Professional Learning Community are grounded from experience seen in the P-12 education field. Until more studies on PLC models in higher education take place, it is unknown to whether the P-12 PLC model is appropriate to implement at additional colleges and universities.

Conclusion

Considering the national context and the new federal government emphasis on cost, value, and quality, institutions of higher education and schools of education must finds ways to operate differently. Given this reality, if the St. Alexander SOE does not respond to the issues

raised by the findings of this study, the long-term viability of the institution may be at risk. In addition to providing a path for the St. Alexander SOE, the findings of this study also could inform future actions taken by colleges and universities in this new era of accountability in higher education.

When I began this study, I was interested in exploring and examining how the St. Alexander University SOE Annual Report process impacted decision-making regarding resource allocation and how the process could lead to a Professional Learning Community in a School of Education. I believe that the findings of the study, even if they are hard to accept, will allow the St. Alexander SOE to move forward in a positive way by implementing the PLC model.

Finally, it is important to state that schools of education will be more socially just and equitable when they function as learning communities. If schools of education adopt and implement the PLC model, they will be able to model for their candidates the best practices that the P-12 field desperately needs in order to create more just and equitable educational structures. While a robust annual reporting process may not seem like a key ingredient for a socially just approach to education, if done well—with transparency and trust—all stakeholders can grow and benefit in ways that address the challenges, opportunity and achievements gaps, and other barriers to a transformative education for all children.

Research Questions

Focus Group Questions: Department Chairs and Academic Program Directors

1. Please describe your understanding of the purpose of the Annual Report Process.
2. Does the Annual Report Process facilitate dialogue, i.e. as a learning community, for improving programs or for decisions made in your program/department?
3. How do you use the data in your report to make requests related to resources?
4. What is your overall experience with this process and do you have any recommendations for improvement? Follow-up: What challenges have you faced? What positive experiences have you had?

Semi-Structured Interview: Dean

1. Please describe your understanding of the purpose of the Annual Report Process.
2. What do you ideally want accomplished in the Annual Report Process?
3. Has the data from the Annual Reports been useful in making decisions related to resource allocation?
4. Do you know of any examples where the Annual Report Process has facilitated dialogue within a program or department or if it has contributed to building a learning community within the SOE?
5. What critical information do you need from the Annual Reports to make informed decisions regarding resources?

Semi-Structured Interview: Past Associate Dean

1. Please describe your understanding of the purpose of the Annual Report Process.
2. What was your experience like when receiving the Annual Reports from programs and Departments?
3. Did you find the data from the Annual Reports helpful when making decisions?
4. Do you know of any examples where the Annual Report Process has facilitated dialogue within a program or department or if it has contributed to a learning community within the SOE?
5. Looking back at the process, what was your overall experience and do you have any recommendations for improvement?

Semi-Structured Interview: Associate Dean Business Services

1. Please describe your understanding of the purpose of the Annual Report Process.
2. Do you use data from the Annual Reports when making resource decisions? Follow-up— Do you find the data from the Annual Reports helpful when making decisions?

3. Do you know of any examples where the Annual Report Process has facilitated dialogue within a program or department or if it has contributed to building a learning community within the SOE?
4. What critical information do you need from the Annual Reports to make informed decisions regarding resources?

Semi-Structured Interview: Assistant Dean for Academic Services

1. Please describe your understanding of the purpose of the Annual Report Process.
2. What has your experience been like when receiving the Annual Reports from programs and Departments?
3. Do you find the data from the Annual Reports helpful for purposes related to accreditation and assessment and for decision making related to programs?
4. Do you know of any examples where the Annual Report Process has facilitated dialogue within a program or department or if it has contributed to a learning community within the SOE?
5. Looking at the process, what is your overall experience and do you have any recommendations for improvement?

Semi-Structured Interview: Director of Assessment

1. Please describe your understanding of the purpose of the Annual Report Process.
2. What has your experience been like when receiving the Annual Reports from programs and Departments?
3. Do you find the data from the Annual Reports helpful for purposes related to accreditation and assessment?
4. Do you know of any examples where the Annual Report Process has facilitated dialogue within a program or department or if it has contributed to a learning community within the SOE?
5. Looking at the process, what is your overall experience and do you have any recommendations for improvement?

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