

A Collective Case Study Analysis of the Decision-Making Processes Utilized by
Community College Practitioners and Workforce Advisory Committee Members to Make
Informed Decisions

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific foci were the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process. The findings of this study will advance higher education practice by providing empirical evidence of the processes and strategies used by community college practitioners and advisory committee members that are perceived to be effective in making informed decisions about workforce education programs.

This qualitative study, conducted through the lens of naturalistic inquiry, utilized a collective case study design that was used to address the four research questions. The settings for this study were two West Texas public community colleges located in the South Plains region of Texas. Participants in this study were four purposefully selected community college practitioners and four members of workforce education program advisory committees at the study institutions. Data collection for this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and institutional documents. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was conducted through the constant-comparative method to identify themes using axial coding. Once coding was completed, field notes of institutional documents were used to triangulate the emerging themes and support the findings. In addition, trustworthiness of the study was ensured by measures to address dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability.

The results of the study illustrate that community college workforce education programs make decisions through their advisory committees. Research question one sought to understand what the participants perceived to be effective practices and strategies in the decision-making process related to workforce programs. The themes that emerged included voice of business and industry, equal representation and balance, and decision-making process. Research question two addressed perceptions of challenges to working collaboratively. The themes that emerged were a lack of knowledge regarding educational system, hiring employees and completers, and workforce respect and trust. The third research question explored the perceptions of the participants of the decision-making process of business and industry and how it affects the decisions made for workforce education programs. The themes that emerged were internships create critical thinkers, sets direction of programs, and support of the college. The final research question sought to understand the participants perceptions about collaborative decision-making. The themes that emerged were wide range of active community members, networking opportunities, and honesty and transparency.

The results of this study led to several implications for higher education practice. The first is that community colleges are reliant on their workforce advisory committees to provide monetary funding, equipment, and personal support. The second implication is that the failure of effective decision-making processes will affect the success of workforce education programs. The third implication is that the effect of strong, involved leadership of the department chair working collaboratively with the advisory committee leader has an effect on the outcomes of the workforce education program. The final

implication is that working collaboratively to make informed decisions for community college workforce education programs is a challenge.

The recommendations for higher education practice based on the findings of this study are that community colleges should strive to work collaboratively with business and industry through their workforce advisory committees to help seek additional funding for their workforce programs. The second recommendation is that the decision-making processes utilized by community colleges must be collaborative and are dependent on the workforce advisory committee. The third recommendation is that community colleges must allow the workforce department chairs the freedom to seek out alliances with business and industry, with the full support of the college. The final recommendation is that community colleges and business and industry need to work collaboratively to make informed decisions about workforce education programs.

The findings of this study lead to future research suggestions. The first is a qualitative study that explores how the decisions made by advisory committees relative to workforce education programs affect the completion rates of workforce education students. Another study of interest how useful an advisory committee consortium would be to the workforce education programs of community colleges. A qualitative study could be conducted to explore having students as members of workforce advisory committees. A final study suggested is to replicate this current study throughout the state of Texas as well as other states to explore the decision-making processes of workforce advise committees in order to order to obtain results that may be generalizable to a wider context.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, the community college has evolved into a central hub for regional communities. A primary focus of community colleges is to meet the needs of and serve the local workforce of their service area; support local economic development, business and industry; and participate in collaborative partnerships among various entities within the communities the colleges serve (Baber, 2011; Bray, 2011; Kress, 2012). A way that these institutions contribute to the local workforce is through their workforce education programs. Workforce education programs prepare students for employment or retraining in a specific occupation (Workforce Education Course Manual [WECM], 2013). These programs provide key training in many areas, including agriculture, automotive technology, building trades, certified nurse's aides, computer skills, electrical, farm and ranch management, wind energy, among others (Baber, 2011; Bray, 2011; Kress, 2012). According to the ACT (2012), it is projected that the training provided in these targeted career areas will result in a workforce that accounts for 23% of all job openings between 2008-2018. The projections on the labor demand are such that community colleges are more than a convenient alternative for students; they are a mandatory staple in the realm of higher education in America (ACT, 2012).

Community college workforce education programs enhance economic stability for the respective college and can create prosperity for both citizens and businesses (Carlson, Holm, & Uhalde, 2011; Hamilton, 2004). These programs tend to be problem-focused, address shortages in skilled labor in a specific region, and generate a trained supply of skilled workers in particular areas of need (Carlson et al., 2011; Kazis, 2011).

Additionally, these programs are designed to link specific employee training with the needs of businesses and industries already established in an area or wanting to expand into the region (Carlson et al., 2011). Colleges are collaborating with businesses and industry in order to find solutions to workforce problems and implement ideas before they become unmanageable issues (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010). When properly implemented, workforce programs connect employee training and community resources to provide a continual supply of local skilled workers (Carlson et al., 2011). The ability of community colleges to supply an educated workforce was also noted by President Barrack Obama through the American Graduation Initiative ([AGI], 2009). The AGI emphasizes that America's economic strength is dependent on the education and skills of its workers, and that community colleges are the institutions to rebuild the capacity and competitiveness of the American workforce by working with businesses, industry, and government partners to create tailored training programs (Obama, 2009).

Workforce programs increase and deepen the relationships between the college and the community, while also creating a vested interest in the local citizenry (Carlson et al., 2011). Through a collaborative and proactive effort, business and industry are partnering with these institutions to provide resources and fund training opportunities to upgrade workers' skills, provide more efficient services, increase employment opportunities in local communities, and reduce educational program costs (Baber, 2011; Bray, 2011; Kress, 2012). Given that community colleges have the ability to adapt rapidly in response to emerging trends, they can add new educational programs or remove obsolete ones, as necessary (Carlson et al., 2011). As such, and at an increasing rate, community colleges are collaborating with local businesses to develop curriculum

and training programs leading to trained graduates who can immediately contribute to the needs of their employers (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010).

Community college workforce education programs, in partnership with local businesses and industry, offer specific training opportunities to guide students towards a career path leading to employment (Carlson et al., 2011; Kazis, 2011). These programs offer easy access to training, quick return on educational investment, and meet a variety of career and educational interests (Carlson et al., 2011; Holzer, 2008; Kazis, 2011). For low-income families who struggle to pay tuition and fees associated with higher education, workforce training offers alternative educational solutions (Price & Roberts, 2009), which are convenient and more economical compared to seeking a four-year degree (Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Holzer, 2008). By enrolling in a local community college to gain new skills, retrain due to job loss, or be retrained for emerging technologies, students may expedite their way to achieving their full potential as an active member of society (Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Hodges, 2012; Hamilton, 2004).

Community College Workforce Programs Advisory Committees

Texas community colleges are required to have advisory committees for their workforce education programs that help them identify trends and developing careers (Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education [GIPWE], 2015; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2013). The role of an advisory committee is to provide expert advice for the development and continuity of workforce education programs, and to provide insight into relevant knowledge and skills needed in the workforce (GIPWE, 2015; THECB, 2013). The state of Texas requires that

postsecondary institutions prove a need exists to add programs; this need is established through the advisory committee (GIPWE, 2015; THECB, 2013).

Advisory committees are vital to community colleges and to the development of new workforce programs. The members of the committee play a key role in ensuring workforce programs meet the needs of the community, by providing their expertise in the field, as well as they influence the direction of workforce programs (GIPWE, 2015; THECB, 2013). When reviewing or proposing a workforce program, the advisory committee is responsible for needs assessments, program review, curriculum planning, public relations, internships, upgrading of facilities, program elimination and expansions, and leadership (GIPWE, 2015; THECB, 2013). Committee members are expected to offer professional advice and programmatic recommendations based on their professional experience (THECB, 2013). Advisory committees are especially helpful to community colleges as they help create programs, obtain resources, and develop public awareness of the training programs (GIPWE, 2015; THECB, 2013).

Advisory committees also can serve as a bridge between community colleges and businesses and industry by helping these institutions develop a rapport with professionals in the community. These professionals can assist community colleges with future programs and needed support (Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011). The advisory committees represent stakeholders in the local community and provide recommendations regarding the education and training needs of the areas they serve, best practices available to meet those needs, requirements of specific programs, adding or removing programs, and advice for addressing differences between advisory members (GIPWE, 2015). In addition, the committee informs college leadership, specifically in the areas of workforce

education, grants, and business and industry training (GIPWE, 2015), as well as assists the college in preparing recommended customized training programs to fit within a specific budget and within the requirements of the college and business partners (THECB, 2013).

According to Day (2001) and Kilcrease (2011), the strength of advisory committees is the wealth of knowledge they bring to workforce education curriculum and their contributions to workforce education programs through collaborative decision-making processes. Decision-making is defined as “the process of developing a commitment to a course of action” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 58). The nature of decision-making and the benefits to using group decision-making processes can maximize the available expertise within an advisory committee (Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011). The decisions colleges and businesses make are complex and the perspectives of multiple members are necessary to assess accurately the need and probable success of a workforce education program (Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

Community college workforce programs meet the needs of their communities by offering students specialized training and critical skills needed for employment (Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Hamilton, 2004; Holzer, 2008). The goal of workforce education programs is to provide students with relevant training and skills to make them employable immediately upon completion of the program (Carlson et al., 2011). Unfortunately, as a result of continual budget constraints, community college administrators encounter difficult decisions when assessing what programs need to be supported and which ones need to be reduced or eliminated (Bray, 2011). These

administrators are often faced with making complex decisions regarding program development, program discontinuity, decision processes, and the justification for those decisions (Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Holzer, 2008). Generally, workforce education programs are more expensive to start-up and maintain compared to liberal arts (Jacobs, 2014). A way community colleges may offset the expense associated with workforce education programs is by collaborating with local businesses and industries (Carlson et al., 2011). Essentially, advisory committees serve as the heart of these partnerships, helping to combine resources, contribute equipment, and their expertise and knowledge in skilled areas (Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Holzer, 2008).

Because the development and operations of workforce education programs are complex in nature, the THECB requires each community college in Texas to implement and document an industry-based advisory committee for each of its workforce education programs (GIPWE, 2015). The advisory committee is used to guide and counsel college leaders, program faculty, and other stakeholders of the best course of action for prospective and existing programs (GIPWE, 2015). The GIPWE (2015) is the official guidelines used by community colleges in Texas in establishing specific program requirements, program demands, and use of an advisory committee. However, the GIPWE does not provide guidelines nor does the literature exist to guide Texas community colleges in how to collaborate effectively with workforce program advisory committees in the decision-making processes that affect workforce education programs. The advisory committee's role and responsibilities relative to committee service and group dynamics, specifically in program consideration, program addition or removal,

educational best practices, and challenges between advisory members, all can impact the success of the program (Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members that make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific foci were the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholder groups, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process. The findings of this study will advance higher education practice by providing empirical evidence of the processes and strategies used by community college practitioners and advisory committee members that are perceived to be effective in making informed decisions about workforce education programs.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following four (4) research questions:

1. What do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are effective practices and strategies in the decision-making process related to workforce education programs?
2. What do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are the challenges to working collaboratively?
3. How do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive the decision-making processes of business and industry impact the decisions made for workforce education programs?

4. What recommendations do community college practitioners and advisory committee members have for collaborative decision-making?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it provides empirical evidence of the decision-making processes perceived to be effective by community college practitioners and advisory committee members to ensure needed and quality workforce education programs in community colleges. These decision-making processes are imperative to providing workforce education programs needed for a skilled workforce locally and across the U.S. In 2009, President Barack Obama announced the American Graduation Initiative (AGI). The AGI challenges community colleges to educate an additional five million students with credentials, certificates, and degrees by 2020. The focus of this education and training is to provide students with the skills necessary to compete for jobs of the future (Obama, 2009). Obama (2009) also noted that jobs of the future will require a minimum of an associate's degree and that these jobs will grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. Community colleges are essential to providing the necessary training to supply a skilled workforce, which is a must for the U.S. to sustain these jobs and keep them in the U.S. (Obama, 2009). The AGI emphasizes that America's economic strength is dependent on the education and skills of its workers, and that community colleges are the institutions to rebuild the capacity and competitiveness of the American workforce by working with businesses, industry, and government partners to create tailored training programs (Obama, 2009).

Through their workforce education programs, community colleges work closely with business and industry employers to identify the workforce skills that are needed for

a trained workforce (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC] and the National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2009). Businesses and industry working alongside community colleges is part of an effort to put Americans back to work in needed skilled areas to help the economy (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010).

Individual businesses do not have the funds or skills necessary to train, conduct research, and market all their needs; especially when competing globally (ACT, 2012; Carlson et al., 2011). According to Carlson et al. (2011), business and industry leaders have realized that combining efforts to train workers results in an effective economic gain by sharing materials, supplies, equipment, and services.

Community colleges offer a diverse range of workforce education programs that are designed to train students with specific hands-on skills to enter directly into the workforce (Hamilton, 2004; Kress, 2012). A study conducted as part of the Brookings-Rockefeller Project, conducted by Richard Kazis (2011), suggests that community college and workforce collaborations are crucial to sustainable economic development. Aligning job training with current economic workforce needs will generate significant numbers of employed workers, specifically in middle skill jobs, will develop a highly qualified labor supply, and help contribute to a long-term supply of workers and a strong sustainable economy (Baber, 2011; Hodges, 2012; Kazis, 2011). To accomplish this goal, regional needs must be aligned with workforce needs and community college workforce education programs are designed to provide this needed training (Hodges, 2012; Perna, 2012).

The community college has the flexibility to quickly develop training programs in areas that lack skilled workers and has the ability to react to changes in industry quickly

(Bray, 2011; Hodges, 2012). Bray (2011), Hodges (2012), and Kazis (2011) suggest that college training – developed through collaborations with business and industry - has a direct connection to improving the economy, and perceive that workforce education programs will provide retraining to unemployed workers, resulting in a decreased unemployment rate and a boost to the economy. These collaborative partnerships result in up-to-date and future training needed to ensure a skilled workforce (Bray, 2011; Hodges, 2012; Kazis, 2011).

The decision-making processes utilized by community colleges and advisory committees for workforce education programs is vital to the program's success in meeting not only the local workforce needs, but also the nation's need per Obama's directive in the AGI (2009). Decision-making processes are complicated by the constant changes in industry, curriculum modifications needed to coincide with changes in business and industry, as well as stakeholders' preferences and expertise (Bray, 2011; Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011). The ability to make decisions and involvement of knowledgeable business and industry leaders on the advisory committee are important components to the successful collaboration (Dixon, 1990; Soares, 2010), between their roles and the needs of the community college workforce education program (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2011; Kilcrease, 2011). This study is significant to higher education practice as it furthers the understanding of the decision-making processes utilized by community colleges and their workforce education advisory committees that led to a qualified and skilled workforce.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The decision-making processes for community college workforce education programs involve collaborations with key individuals in local businesses and industry and have wide-ranging ramifications for the parties involved (Bess & Dee, 2008). These key business and educational leaders combine their skills and expertise together in an effort to produce a quality workforce education program. Operations of organizations differ from one to the other in makeup and size but rely on the decision-making talents of many individuals (Jones, 2006; Spector, 2012). The purpose of this study was to explore the decision-making processes of community college practitioners in workforce education programs and their advisory committees made up of business and industry leaders. The two entities differ in their makeup and size, but are reliant on each other to make necessary decisions for effective workforce education programs.

The conceptual framework that guided this study was based on the concept that decision-making is a process, whether in business or education, and there are those individuals that possess skills in making accurate decisions (Jones, 2006; Spector, 2012). According to Day (2001) and Kilcrease (2011), the strength of community college workforce education program advisory committees is the wealth of knowledge they bring to workforce education curriculum, and their contributions to workforce education programs through collaborative decision-making processes. The nature of decision-making and the benefits to using group decision-making processes can maximize the available expertise within an advisory committee (Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011). The decisions a college and business make are complex, and the perspectives of multiple

members are necessary to assess accurately the need and probable success of a workforce education program (Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999).

Summary of Methodology

This qualitative study was conducted through the lens of naturalistic inquiry using a collective case study design. The setting for this study was two public community colleges located in the South Plains region of Texas. There were a total of eight purposefully selected participants made up of four community college practitioners and four current workforce education advisory committee members from the study institutions. Data collection tools utilized for this study were the lens of the researcher, semi-structured interviews, field notes, documents, and reflexive journaling. Data analysis of the data collected was conducted using the constant comparative method, as well as open and axial coding. Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through qualitative measures to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the conduction of the study.

Assumptions of the Study

This study was conducted based on the following assumptions. The first was that multiple realities may emerge during the interview process from different individual perspectives (Creswell, 2014). It was assumed that the participants answered the questions honestly and expanded upon their answers for the benefit of the study. The final assumptions were that the participants in this study understood decision-making processes and are experienced in applying them in their roles as community college workforce education practitioners and advisory committee members.

Limitations of the Study

There were two limitations associated with this study. The first was due to the vast geographical locations of community colleges in the state of Texas, the researcher was limited in the ability to travel throughout the state. This limited the study to being conducted at two institutions located within the South Plains region of the state. The second limitation is that the transferability of the results of this study is at the discretion of the reader.

Definition of Key Terms

Key terms used in the study will be defined below.

- *Advisory committees* provide expert advice for the development and continuity of workforce education programs, and to provide insight into relevant knowledge and skills needed in the workforce (Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education [GIPWE], 2015; Minnesota State Colleges and Universities [MNSCU], 2013).
- *Decision-making* is defined as “the process of developing a commitment to a course of action” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 58).
- *Workforce education programs* provide training or retraining in specialized fields to educate and prepare students to enter the workforce (Hodges, 2012; Workforce Education Course Manuel [WECM], 2013).

Summary

Due to the demand for accountability and measurement regarding educational programs in community colleges, the decision-making process of advisory committee is more important than ever. The role of the advisory committee for community college

workforce programs is changing and becoming increasingly necessary due to legislative actions and consistent changes in the needs of the workforce. Business, industry, and higher education institutions are adapting programs to fit thriving regional economies and are calling upon advisory committees to make major decisions within their organizations, yet businesses and industry have their own decision-making processes, potentially different than community college administrators. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members that make informed decisions for workforce education programs. The findings of this study can be used to advance higher education practice by providing empirical evidence of the processes and strategies used by community college practitioners and advisory committee members that are perceived to be effective in making informed decisions about workforce education programs.

Organization of the Study

Chapter II will present a review of the literature on community colleges, workforce education programs, and advisory committees. Chapter III will describe the methodological and research design used for this study. Chapter IV will address the finding of the study, and Chapter V will discuss the findings, implications, and recommendations based on the findings for higher education practice, and provide recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II provides a review of the literature on community colleges, workforce education, and advisory committees. The following topics will be discussed: 1) overview of community colleges; 2) overview of workforce education in community colleges; 3) contributions of workforce education programs to the workforce and the economy; 4) community college workforce education program advisory committees; and 5) decision-making processes of workforce education programs and advisory committees. The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of and experiences with decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and advisory committee members who make informed decisions for workforce education programs.

Overview of Community Colleges

The role of higher education has progressed from education of the elite in the early 11th and 12th centuries, to its current focus in the 21st century of educating the workforce with specific training (Bess & Dee, 2008; Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Although historically the focus of the two-year higher education institution was on vocational and adult education, general studies were also a major component of the vocational programs in the early 1900s (Cohen et al., 2014). During this time, vocational programs were perceived to be less prestigious by society and were perceived to lead to lower paying jobs versus a professional career (Beach, 2011). The two-year institution was commonly referred to as a junior college and began as preparatory schools located in high schools or near universities (Beach, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2011). Junior colleges traditionally offered a curriculum favoring a growing community's civic, social,

religious, and vocational needs within close proximity to the institution (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Cohen et al., 2014).

Junior colleges experienced several enrollment increases during the 1920s and 1930s, attributed to public awareness of their roles and an increase in high school enrollments (Beach, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014). By 1927, there were 325 two-year colleges that enrolled approximately 35,630 students (Beach, 2011). These institutions also became a national priority in the U.S. by the 1940s, as some 600,000 young men were unemployed as a result of the Great Depression (Beach, 2011). The first vocational programs were introduced at the junior college as a way to ease the unemployment problem and to help get Americans into the workforce (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2013; Beach, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2011). Colleges were expected to solve the social problems facing Americans, as vocational training was beginning to be perceived as an avenue for personal growth (Bess & Dee, 2008; Thelin, 2011).

The two-year institution experienced another transformation after World War II, as the needs of society changed from a focus on military industries to skilled workers in consumer goods (AACC, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also referred to as the GI Bill, had an impact on the U.S. socially and economically (AACC, 2013; Beach, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014). The GI Bill enabled student veterans to receive financial assistance for college, which allowed them to enter the workforce with specific training (AACC, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014). The bill provided financial aid for student veterans to cover tuition and living expenses (Cohen et al., 2014; Thelin, 2011). Veterans who were looking for jobs after the war were

redirected towards postsecondary institutions and received vocational training with the assistance of the GI Bill (AACC, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014).

Additional support for junior colleges came from President Harry S. Truman and the Truman Commission's report released in 1947. The *Higher Education for American Democracy* report stated that half the population in the U.S. could benefit from attending a junior college (Beach, 2011). The report gave recognition to the two-year institution and expanded its mission to include general studies, vocational education, and programs to meet local community needs (Beach, 2011). The report encouraged a new identity and mission for the junior college, one that included community, leading to the change in name from *junior college* to the *community college*, as it is known today (Cohen et al., 2014; Vaughan, 1983). The 1970's found community colleges responding to local needs by extending programs and services including vocational education, developmental education, career education, and academic advising (Ayers, 2010). The U.S. Office of Education popularized vocational education during this time, and community colleges saw a subsequent percentage of vocational students enrolling in programs leading to employment in semi-skilled and skilled occupations within the 1,233 community colleges in the U.S. (Cohen et al., 2014; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2013).

In the 1980s, private and rural community colleges served as cultural and recreational centers for communities, supporting the community service function within these institutions (Cohen et al., 2014; Crawford & Jervis, 2011). The liberal arts gained a new focus in community colleges in the 1990s, with enrollments increasing in courses

that focused on social and ethnic studies. It was during this time that the number of community colleges in the U.S. reached 1,244 (Cohen et al., 2014).

In the early 21st century community colleges served more diverse students while challenged to provide a quality education and enhanced educational services – all with fewer resources (Cohen et al., 2014). It was during this time that public higher education experienced severe state and local funding cuts in almost every area of the U.S. (Tschechtelin, 2011). State legislatures viewed higher education budgets as discretionary when compared with other public entities, such as the public education system and health care, leaving public community colleges as targets for budget cuts (Hendrick, Hightower, & Gregory, 2006; Tschechtelin, 2011).

Despite suffering from increased state funding cuts, in 2005 community colleges enrolled 6.2 million students and 41% of all undergraduate enrollments (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). In 2006, 62% of community college students enrolled part time compared to 27% of public four-year student populations (Crawford & Jervis, 2011). According to the AACC (2015), in 2013 community colleges enrolled over 12.4 million students and 46% of all undergraduate students. In 2015, there were a total of 1,123 community colleges in the U.S. (includes public, private, and tribal institutions) (AACC, 2015).

In 2013, community colleges served the largest percentage of minority students and those from the lowest socio-economic statuses (AACC, 2015). These institutions continue to be seen as the institutions that are the most prepared and capable to produce an educated workforce in the U.S. This is supported in President Barack Obama's American Graduation Initiative (AGI). The AGI challenges community colleges to educate an additional five million students with credentials, certificates, and degrees by

2020. The focus of this education is to provide students with the skills necessary to compete for jobs of the future (Obama, 2009).

Obama (2009) noted that jobs of the future will require a minimum of an associate's degree and that these jobs will grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. Community colleges are essential for providing the necessary training to supply a skilled workforce, which is a must for the U.S. to sustain these jobs and keep them in the U.S. (Obama, 2009). The AGI emphasizes that America's economic strength is dependent on the education and skills of its workers, and that community colleges are the institutions to rebuild the capacity and competitiveness of the American workforce by working with businesses, industry, and government partners to create tailored training programs (Obama, 2009).

Overview of Workforce Education in Community Colleges

There are several terms utilized in higher education to denote vocational education. These terms include terminal, vocational, occupational, career, technical, and workforce education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Cohen et al., 2014). Prior to the 1940s, the term *vocational* denoted programs in agriculture, trades, and sales (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Cohen et al., 2014). In the 1940s the term *terminal* included all studies, other than baccalaureate, leading to employment (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Cohen et al., 2014). The vocational programs were known as *career education* in the 1950s, and were geared towards younger students to acclimate them to future work encompassing occupational and career studies (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Cohen et al., 2014). Vocational education was initially considered a necessary part of a student's education, and for those students not seeking a terminal degree, the two-year college offered skills training that was more

advanced than skills they learned in high school (AACC, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Workforce and technical programs provide training in specialized fields to educate and prepare students to enter the workforce (Hodges, 2012). For purposes of this study, workforce education will be the term used to identify these programs at two-year institutions. Workforce education has been an integral part of the community college curriculum since 1862 (Cohen et al., 2014, Library of Congress, 2010). In the 20th century, the expectation of community colleges was to train workers in order for the U.S. to have a skilled supply of employees for industries (Cohen et al., 2014). Workforce education in the U.S. evolved through the Morrill Act of 1862, which allowed colleges to use the proceeds from federal land sales to establish institutions (AACC, 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Library of Congress, 2010). Colleges focused on agriculture and mechanical arts, whereby the act created the first workforce education initiative (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Library of Congress, 2010).

In the 1950s and 1960s, workforce education was considered only for those students who needed or wanted to complete formal trade schooling in order to be eligible to join the workforce (Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Since the 1970s, it has become common practice for students who complete their workforce programs to transfer to baccalaureate studies. This is due in part to the development of articulation agreements (Beach, 2011; Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Articulation agreements are partnerships between community colleges and four-year colleges or universities whereby certain courses taken at a community college are transferable to the four-year institution (Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

From the 1960s through the 1980s, workforce education programs grew faster in community colleges than liberal arts programs did due to many factors (Cohen et al., 2014). These factors included the early leadership of the community college movement of developing a focus of these institutions on training students for the workplace. In addition, the Vocational Act of 1963 and its amendments; changing labor markets; increased enrollments of part-time students other than White, elite males; absorption of adult education and occupational programs from secondary schools; among other things (Cohen et al., 2014), also contributed to this growth.

In addition to the above, Cohen et al. (2014) identify multiple legislative acts that affected the growth of workforce education in the U.S.:

- 1963 Vocational Education Act;
- 1968 and 1972 the Vocational Education Act Amendments;
- 1973 the Comprehensive Training and Employment Administration;
- 1982 Job Training Act; and
- 1984 Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act.

The federal Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its subsequent amendments, is an act that has had significant impact on workforce education programs in community colleges. The act provided additional federal funds to community colleges to aid in workforce programs, work-study programs, business education, educational classes, and research (Cohen et al., 2014). Congress approved the Vocational Education Act in order to align training with the needs of industry and business (Cohen et al., 2014). In 1968 and 1972, Congress approved additional funds through amendments to this act, which provided additional support for workforce education programs, including to provide

training for students with disabilities (Cohen et al., 2014). The act redirected a major portion of funding to workforce education programs in order to allow for students to be trained, and in some cases retrained, in skilled areas, especially in areas of technology (Vocational Education Act, 1963). In addition, the act also required states to change and upgrade workforce training to coincide with economic demands and to compete globally (Cohen et al., 2014).

With the additional financial support provided by the U.S. government, enrollment in workforce education programs continued to increase (Cohen et al., 2014). Associate degrees awarded from U.S. community colleges in 2010-2011 numbered 852,144, with workforce education areas accounting for 64% ($n = 545,474$) of the degrees awarded (Cohen et al., 2014). Associate degrees awarded in workforce education have had a continual substantial increase in enrollment and growing popularity over the years (Cohen et al., 2014).

Workforce Education in Texas Community Colleges

Workforce education curriculum. In the state of Texas, the THECB guides the curriculum of workforce education programs. The THECB is the oversight board for the state of Texas' institutions of higher education that oversees the quality and standard of academic programs in the state; promoting access, affordability, quality, and success in order to prepare a competent workforce (THECB, 2014). Individual workforce education programs determine how many contact hours are required for individual courses and the program overall; these requirements are listed in the Workforce Education Course Manual (WECM) (THECB, 2014). If the workforce program confers a degree, the requirements of that degree, including the core subjects and academic courses required,

will be identified (THECB, 2014). For certificate programs, the number of semester credit hours (SCH) will be listed under each program in the WECM (THECB, 2014). The above information can be found in the WECM, as well as the course name, prefix, number, type, lab hours, contact hours, and credits earned (THECB, 2014).

The Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education ([GIPWE], 2015) manual lists all workforce education programs as well as the requirements for each program, in the state of Texas. Also the costs, details, and forms for the workforce education programs can be found in the manual. For the state of Texas, the THECB oversees the issuance of the GIPWE manual and regulates the rules and requirements that govern workforce education programs (THECB, 2014).

Funding of Workforce Education Programs

The state of Texas provides contact hour funding to community colleges for their workforce programs and the Texas legislature sets the amount of compensation each legislative session (THECB, 2013). A THECB advisory committee conducts a cost study to determine how much it should cost per student to run the individual workforce education program. The THECB does not fund 100% of the program; the 2013 reimbursement rate was 30%. The legislature appropriation for contact hours was down by 8% from 2008 to 2011 and down another 29% for 2013. This equates to a 35% funding decrease over the past five years for community colleges in Texas.

Any new workforce education program must receive approval from the THECB prior to start-up so that it can determine if necessary funds are available to support the new program within the institution and that there is a need in the state for the specific training (THECB, 2013). The college is then responsible for the 70% adjustment that is

not covered by the state reimbursement. The college can cover this cost by collecting tuition, fees, grants, and/or partnering with business and industry, which in turn will also benefit from these programs being offered (THECB, 2013). The initial start-up costs for institutions may be too costly and difficult to recover without partnering with business and industry (Carlson, Holm, & Uhalde, 2011).

When community college practitioners find they are facing limited funds to operate their institutions, and funding has not been appropriated to match the student population, they are faced with difficult decisions (Carlson et al., 2011; Oliff, Palacios, Johnson, & Leachman, 2013). According to Johnson, Oliff, and Williams (2011), the Texas legislature cut public higher education budgets 5% across-the-board, resulting in a decrease of \$73 million for the 2010-2011 fiscal year. This forced institutions to increase tuition. Further, Oliff et al. (2013) pointed out that increases in tuition are not the only decision colleges have to make to offset funding reductions. Other difficult decisions include cuts in staff, courses, and supplies, as well as campus closures. Budget decision-making has also become more complex due to demands for accountability and curriculum changes by stakeholders (Oliff et al., 2013).

In addition to state funding offered by the state of Texas, there are other entities that provide support and funding for workforce education. In Texas, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) provides funding for students in high demand areas for retraining (Texas Workforce Commission, 2013). The amount of funding depends on the student's economic factors and is needs based. The TWC has a skills development fund specifically designated to partner with community and technical colleges, to offer industry and workforce evaluation and training to accommodate a rapidly changing

economy (Combs, 2010). The TWC targets training and retraining students for the area labor needs in the business community (Combs, 2010). Local Economic Development Corporations (EDC) also provide funding for training and retraining in their area for new businesses seeking skilled employees (TWC, 2013). The EDC will pay for instructors, classes, and books, as well as help organize the planning for the new creation of workforce programs at the college (TWC, 2013). An example is the city of Sugarland, Texas, who was awarded \$506,700 -- equating to \$1,190 for each retrained worker out of the Texas state fund -- for the year 2010-2011 (Sugarland, 2012). Organizations have found it is beneficial to the community college and overall success of the workforce education program to include the EDC director on advisory boards (Sugarland, 2012).

Workforce Education Programs and the Economy

Almost two-thirds of all jobs that pay enough to support a family (Pluhta & Penny, 2013), and future jobs that can provide individuals with economic security, require education beyond high school (Obama, 2009; Kotamraju & Blackman, 2011). Mullin (2010) indicates wages increase with each additional educational level attained, and Felix and Pope (2010) support that more educated citizens make more money, generate additional tax revenues for communities, rely less on public support, are less likely to be unemployed, and less likely to be incarcerated. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices reported that 63% of middle-skills jobs would require postsecondary education (Baber, 2011). These jobs pay well and are expected to remain in high demand (Baber, 2011). Between 2008 and 2018, it is estimated there will be almost 47 million jobs available in the middle-skills area of inspectors, electricians,

plumbers, machinists, welders, paralegals, and dental hygienists (Baber, 2011), all areas of training offered in community college workforce education programs.

In the U.S. there is a growing interest in workforce education programs leading to employment (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). According to the NCES (2012), there was a total student enrollment of 60.4% ($n = 512,953$) in workforce education fields in 2010 as compared to 39.6% ($n = 336,619$) in academic fields in the U.S. Of the 512,953 students in workforce education, according to a report produced by the NCES (2012), student interest areas in workforce education in 2010 included health sciences (35% of students), manufacturing and construction (5%), consumer services (5%), and business management (20%). This same report indicated that in the same year, 849,572 total associate's degrees awarded (39.6%) were in the academic fields, compared to 60.4% of degrees being conferred in the workforce education fields (NCES, 2012). Of the 60.4% of the degrees offered in the workforce education fields, 20.9% were in the health sciences, followed by 12% in business management (NCES, 2012).

Community colleges are in the business of educating and preparing students to enter quickly into high demand jobs (Engberg, 2007; Hodges, 2012). A way that community colleges attract businesses to invest in a community is for them to provide a well-educated and trained workforce to the community (ACT, 2012; Baber, 2011; Hodges, 2012). The role of community colleges in local economies is to teach students the necessary skills required to transition into the workforce in a short period of time (Hamilton, 2004; Kress, 2012). More than half of the community college students enrolled in Texas are in workforce education programs (ACT, 2012), with 266,766 students enrolled in workforce education classes in the year 2011-2012 (NCES, 2013). It

is projected that over 800,000 associate degrees in workforce education will be conferred by 2021 compared to just over 600,000 in 2012 in the U.S. (NCES, 2013).

The Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) stated that “education provided by community colleges benefits society through higher personal income which generates increased tax revenue, reduced welfare costs, reduced unemployment costs, improved health, and reduced crime” (TACC, 2011, p. 2). Texas taxpayers saw a 6.9% rate of return for students in community college programs for the year 2010 (THECB, 2012). As for the students, this equated to \$5.20 higher income dollar per hour as working citizens (THECB, 2012). The THECB found that the tax money expended directly to colleges yielded a total benefit of \$28 for each tax dollar to all Texas residents and avoided individuals being on a social program (THECB, 2012).

Through their workforce education programs, community colleges work closely with business and industry employers to identify the workforce skills that are needed, and design a training program led by the college that will create a feasible solution to provide trained workers (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC] and National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2009). Workforce education programs are designed to create coursework matching the needs of business and industry that will lead to certificates, permits, degrees, and ultimately employment for the student (AACC & NCEE, 2009). Businesses and industry working with community colleges is part of an effort to put American’s back to work in needed skilled areas to help the economy (Carlson et al., 2011). Individual businesses do not have the funds or skills necessary to train, conduct research, and market all their needs, especially when competing globally (ACT, 2012; Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010). According to Carlson et al. (2011),

business and industry leaders have realized that combining efforts to train workers results in an effective economic gain by sharing materials, supplies, equipment, and services. These scholars have found that economic development organizations working with education, government agencies, and training providers collaborate effectively to develop and identify new market areas, train the needed workers with access to specialized technology and information (e.g., Carlson et al., 2011). In addition, they suggest allowing the invested stakeholders in the area to be instrumental in the decision-making process in order to ward off too much control from any one entity resulting in an impeding of progress. Carlson et al. (2011) explain that bringing leaders together under a general-purpose prohibits a partner from having too much control.

A particular characteristic of community colleges is that they offer a diverse range of workforce education programs that impact the economy. These programs are designed to train students with specific hands-on skills to enter directly into the workforce (Hamilton, 2004; Kress, 2012). A study conducted as part of the Brookings-Rockefeller Project, conducted by Richard Kazis (2011), suggests that community college and workforce collaborations are crucial to sustainable economic development. Aligning job training with current economic workforce needs will generate significant numbers of employed workers, specifically in middle skill jobs, will develop a highly qualified labor supply, and help contribute to a long-term supply of workers and a strong sustainable economy (Baber, 2011; Hodges, 2012; Kazis, 2011). To accomplish this goal, regional needs must be aligned with workforce needs and the workforce education program is designed to provide this needed training (Hodges, 2012). The findings of the Brookings-Rockefeller Project indicate a need to streamline current certificate programs at

community colleges to achieve stronger economic payoffs (Kazis, 2011), by producing graduates quicker through the restructuring of programs into more flexible modes of delivery such as weekend courses, block courses, and online delivered courses.

The community college has the flexibility to quickly develop training programs in areas that lack skilled workers (Bray, 2011; Hodges, 2012). These institutions have the ability to react to changes in industry quickly, and can offer degrees and certificates in specifically focused areas (Bray, 2011; Hodges, 2012). According to Bray (2011), to meet the needs of communities, community colleges provide shortened and faster workforce education programs using a multitude of learning modes to reach adult learners and help them compete across the nation. Further, Bray (2011) suggests that college training has a direct connection to improving the economy. Scholars, including Bray (2011), perceive that workforce education programs will provide retraining to unemployed workers, resulting in a decreased unemployment rate and a boost to the economy (e.g., Hodges, 2012; Kazis, 2011). Business and industry working together with community colleges produce a skilled and relevant workforce, contributing to a decreased unemployment rate (Bray, 2011; Price & Roberts, 2009). In addition, these collaborative partnerships result in up-to-date and future training needed to ensure a skilled workforce (Bray, 2011; Hodges, 2012; Kazis, 2011).

The growth and success of workforce education programs in community colleges have contributed a supply of trained workers for the U.S. Cohen et al. (2014) discussed the results of a national survey conducted by Quinley and Cantrell in 1998 that found that 90% of the 396 employers they surveyed were satisfied with the quality of training the employees received from the community college, and the cost associated with such

training was good. Another example was found in 2008-2009 in the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). The NCCCS reported 10,707 employers of community college graduates were surveyed regarding satisfaction with workforce graduates (NCCCS, 2010). Of the 25% ($n = 2,667$) of surveys completed and returned, 97% of employers were satisfied with their employee's job preparation (NCCCS, 2010). Further, evidence suggests that students with training received from a community college are more likely to be employed based on their training and expertise. In 2010, Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) reported, of their 2009 graduates totaling 24,121 degrees granted, 88% of graduates were employed within six months and 71% of students were employed in the area they received training (WTCS, 2011).

Community college workforce training is viewed as essential to economic growth and colleges must continue to provide trained workers to match available jobs (AACC, 2013; Cohen et al., 2014). The needs of business and industry shift towards specialized employees, which community college workforce education programs can provide (Carlson et al., 2011). This training geared toward particular skills comes at a high cost and is carried mainly by the community college. According to the NCES (2010), business and industry leaders must be willing to partner with community colleges and acknowledge their share of training expenses as colleges are growing rapidly and their budgets are continuing to decrease (NCES, 2010; Soares, 2010). Cohen et al. (2014) suggest opening channels to merge public and private funds so that an equitable share is borne by each.

Community College Workforce Education Programs Advisory Committees

As noted previously, workforce education programs provide training in specialized fields to educate and prepare students to enter the workforce (Hodges, 2012; AACC & NCEE, 2009). Community colleges are consulting and working together with business and industry to form results-driven beneficial programs to prepare students and help the college stay informed of current advances (Hodges, 2012). Such collaborations provide relevant training advice to craft fluid and dynamic relationships with education, business, and industry in support of current workforce demands (Hodges, 2012; Soares, 2010). To accomplish the connection between business and industry and workforce education programs, community colleges utilize advisory committees (Hodges, 2012). Collaborative advisory committees are used to guide and advise community colleges and their stakeholders regarding the best course of action regarding prospective and current programs (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010). The advisory committee is made up of skilled decision-makers, which are key to the success of education and business collaborations (Carlson et al., 2011). The workforce education program is run by the community college with input from the advisory committees. The college is the central hub combining workforce, economic development, business, industry, and collaborative dealings, serving as the key provider of services; and negotiations in developing and implementing programs, training, and curriculum in workforce and technical areas of instruction (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010; AACC & NCEE, 2009).

The THECB requires each community college workforce education program in Texas to be guided by an industry-led advisory committee (GIPWE, 2015). The THECB necessitates each workforce education program create a separate advisory committee in

order to document a need for the program, to secure adequate resources for the program, and to create an effective curriculum to fit the needs of the students and society (GIPWE, 2015). The advisory committee members are knowledgeable in workforce and technical skills, and can provide direction for the workforce education programs (TWC, 2013). The committees serve to promote effective community engagement, generate community interest, develop courses, recommend development of courses, identify business needs, secure corporate participation, and offer professional guidance to the college (TWC, 2013). The committee explores and documents programmatic needs; determines adequate resources and appropriate programmatic design; suggests program revisions; evaluates designed curriculum; identifies the skills and knowledge needed to meet business and industry needs; and ensures business and industry participation (GIPWE, 2015).

Advisory committees are composed of a broad representation of the demographics of the service area (GIPWE, 2015). While each community college district has its own guidelines for advisory committees, they all generally consist of influential individuals within the community who offer current and relevant advice, as well as generate public support for the programs (GIPWE, 2015). The advisory committee is industry based (GIPWE, 2015), and its members generally consist of industry leaders (Davis & Davis, 2009); such as economic development directors, district and county judges, county commissioners, bankers, financial advisers, business leaders, workforce managers, and retired college administrators (Benigni, Ferguson, & McGee, 2011; Kilcrease, 2011; Lu, 2004).

Purpose and Roles of Advisory Committees

The purpose of a community college advisory committee is to use result-driven practices to improve the prosperity of businesses (AACCC & NCEE, 2009; Kerka, 2002). Nationally, community college advisory committees have increased to create a competitive advantage, and utilize their experiences in business and industry to discuss strategy and planning in specific workforce and technology programs (Kilcrease, 2011). Kilcrease (2011) reports that the most successful advisory boards use two-way communication, including the committee members and program faculty, with the greatest contributions in the areas of fundraising, current marketing trends, curriculum development, and accreditation requirements. It has been found that the most successful advisory committees meet in shops or locations of the business instead of the classroom or meeting area at the college (Kilcrease, 2011). Kilcrease (2011) also reports more success when advisory committee members represent various specialties and occupations of expertise.

The advisory committee is important to the community college workforce education program as it works as the liaison between business and industry and the college (Davis & Davis, 2009; Kerka, 2002; Kilcrease, 2011). Advisory committees can facilitate internships for students, raise funds for programs, provide speakers and faculty, and help students to locate gainful employment (Benigni et al., 2011; Davis & Davis, 2009). To be effective, the committee serves to suggest changes and updates to keep the curriculum current and relevant for society's workforce needs (Benigni et al., 2011; Davis & Davis, 2009; GIPWE, 2015).

More specifically to Texas, the advisory committee exists for the duration of the workforce education program (GIPWE, 2015). Members must represent the demographics and diversity of the college's service area and field of study, representing both the public and private sectors (GIPWE, 2015). It should be noted that full-time faculty members do not serve on the committee to prevent too much influence, but do offer advice to the committee (GIPWE, 2015). Each workforce program advisory committee must meet at least once a year and document the meeting and communications (GIPWE, 2015). The minutes are to be kept on file at the college and are available to the THECB upon request (GIPWE, 2015). The individual college's academic senate and executive committees set-up their own terms for advisory committee members to serve and the length of time each member will serve on the committee (GIPWE, 2015).

An advisory committee leads the decision-making process relative to workforce education programs; and is engaged in the process from the inception, and continues to be active and fluidly participates in the programs until they cease to exist (AACC & NCEE, 2009; Kazis, 2011). The role of the committee is ongoing and active throughout the duration of the program (Kerka, 2002).

Decision-making Processes of Workforce Education

Programs and Advisory Committees

The ability to make decisions and involvement of knowledgeable members on the advisory committee are important components to the successful collaboration between their roles and the needs of the community college workforce education program (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2011; Kilcrease, 2011). Looking at the nature of decision-making and the benefits to workforce programs, group decision-making can be used to

maximize the use of available expertise within an advisory committee (Carlson et al., 2011; Kilcrease, 2011). The decisions a college and business make are complex, and the perspectives of multiple members are necessary to assess accurately the need and probable success of a workforce education program (Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999). Since advisory committees generally consist of a variety of individuals with varying leadership experiences and management styles (Dixon, 1990), transparent decision-making is critical for group success (Bess & Dee, 2008).

In order to achieve the overall goals of the advisory committee, Burke and Miller (1999) suggest that four decision-making steps are necessary: 1) identify the nature of the problem; 2) identify possible solutions; 3) identify why participants enter and leave the process; and 4) identify choice opportunities (Bess & Dee, 2008; Burke & Miller, 1999). The decision-making process for education often differs from that of business and industry (Allingham, 2002; Bess & Dee, 2008; Burke & Miller, 1999).

Central to the success of the alliance between and among members of advisory committees is the leadership and commitment of the stakeholders (Burke & Miller, 1999; Johnson, 2013). Leaders who represent a local community and are familiar with the customs and idiosyncrasies of the community, already having an established respect and trust of the stakeholders, have the ability to get results, and are better prepared to handle leadership roles (Carlson et al., 2011). Similarly, Northouse (2013) perceives that key individuals have the ability to influence a group to achieve a common goal. The leader's role in any advisory committee is not to take on the sole responsibility of the group but to influence others to work towards the common goal of the committee (Carson et al., 2011). Northouse (2013) states a strong leader should be able to "move people to higher

standards of moral responsibility...to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the team, organization, or company” (p. 201).

Selecting the right individuals to serve on an advisory committee is imperative for the success of the workforce education program. Members who have influence within the local community are instrumental in seeking support for programs, both financially and with placement of students after completion (Johnson, 2013). It is helpful if advisory committee members are enthusiastic about serving on the committee and committed to the overall success of the program (Johnson, 2013). Their enthusiasm and leadership helps guide the committee members to agree upon decisions and help create unity between the members (Northouse, 2013). Individuals who are willing to make concessions and negotiate are best served in the area of workforce education programs (Burke & Miller, 1999; Johnson, 2013; Northouse, 2013).

Summary

The community college provides training for students in specialized areas of the workforce to support business and industry demands. This practice dates back to 1957, as junior colleges identified the vocational-technical needs to fulfill society’s workforce shortages (Cohen et al., 2014). As society demands specialized skills and knowledge for employees seeking jobs, community colleges are adapting to changing demands of the workforce and providing a range of diverse programs (Cohen et al., 2014). Many of these positions are high paying, resulting in higher personal income of the country’s citizens, contributing to the overall good of the economy (Cohen et al., 2014).

Community colleges are working with local businesses and industry in order to effectively collaborate on workforce training that carries-over into the community

(Hamilton, 2004). The heart of these collaborations is the role of the advisory committees and their decision-making processes. Advisory committees use the knowledge of committee member experts to make decisions regarding workforce education programs. The influential members of the community make-up the advisory committee, working in conjunction with the local community college to offer relevant advice and generate support (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010). Their varied expertise in specialized areas of workforce advises the committee on key decisions to produce needed quality programs.

Advisory committees are the connection that binds workforce educational programs with business and industry. In the fast paced work force, community colleges are well adapted to making changes, but with the affiliation of advisory committee members this helps lead to success of the program and students. The advisory committee members can open doors for students, provide leads on possible job opportunities, give advice, and help students train for skills that are highly sought after in the community. Independently, community colleges and business and industry may be talented in their areas, but by combining efforts, they provide a unique opportunity for the students, community, and society as a whole.

Because of the surge in oil and gas production in the West Texas area, a demand for quality-trained workers in specific areas has emerged. The community colleges are combining efforts with business and industry to quickly and efficiently train workers for immediate entry into the local workforce with the support from the community. The decision to combine the talents and resources of business and industry with education provided by the community college (Soares, 2010) is providing skilled workers for West

Texas. However, even with the efforts of the guidance of the Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Programs and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board over séance, the program decisions are complicated and complex.

The decision-making process for workforce programs is complicated due to constant changes in industry, curriculum modifications, and stakeholders (Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011). Colleges would benefit from an operation rubric or specific guideline to aid an advisory committee in their decision-making. This study explored the experiences of administrators in college workforce and technical programs, as well as business executives' experiences, shared proven practices, recommendations, and advice for selection of the advisory members, as that knowledge has helped to guide advisory committees in the decision-making process for workforce programs.

Chapter III will present the methodology and the research design of this study. In addition, the context of the study and research will be discussed, as well as how the trustworthiness was ensured in the conduction of the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III describes the methodology and research designed used to conduct this study. In addition to the paradigm, study institutions, participants, context of study and researcher, and how trustworthiness of the research process are discussed. of this study was to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs.

Restatement of the Research Questions

This study was guided by the following four (4) research questions:

1. What do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are effective practices and strategies in the decision making process related to workforce programs?
2. What do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are the challenges to working collaboratively?
3. How do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive the decision-making processes of business and industry impact the decisions made for workforce education programs?
4. What recommendations do community college practitioners and advisory committee members have for collaborative decision-making?

Research Design

Establishing the Paradigm

A qualitative methodology was used to conduct this study. Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research focuses on individual meaning and concentrates on the complexity of situations. Qualitative research was used to gain an understanding of and the meaning of groups (Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) point out that qualitative research practices enable researchers to interpret the world by turning it into a set of explanations. Studying individuals in their natural setting assisted the researcher in interpreting and making sense out of a group and the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study, utilizing a qualitative research methodology, focused on the individual meaning regarding a complex situation (Creswell, 2014).

The qualitative study was conducted through the lens of the naturalistic paradigm. A paradigm is the beliefs and values the research community accepts to guide the actions of the research (Creswell, 2014), and is the individual's perspective and the relationships with it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Using the naturalistic paradigm, the researcher assumes the realities constructed by participants are interrelated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research revealed like experiences with decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education program through the participants' perceptions and experiences. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), reality is continuously changing and shaped by the experiences of the participants. The naturalistic researcher shares those realities through interpretation, developing a frame of knowledge

from the participants' realities, resulting in an understanding of the phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Type of Study

This study sought to explore answers to how and why questions, which are used to give meaning to social experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A complex phenomenon exists in relation to decision-making and best practices for workforce education advisory committees. The researcher gained an in-depth understanding from the participants in their natural setting and determined how and why they make the decisions they do (Creswell, 2014). The research design that was used for this study was case study. Merriam (2009) states a case study is used to gain in-depth meaning of a situation. A case study according to Creswell (2013), Merriam (2009), and Patton (2002), is an analysis of a single unit or phenomenon, known as a bounded system, such as a program, group, or individual. Case study research involves the study of a problem or issue studied through one or more cases within a bounded setting (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2007), in a qualitative collective case study approach, multiple cases are used to collect in-depth data within a bounded setting. This strengthened the research by using multiple cases and enhances the validity of the study (Merriam, 2009). Using the collective case study design provided the researcher the ability to integrate and reveal different perspectives related to the issue (Creswell, 2014).

Study Setting

The settings for this study were two West Texas public community colleges located in the South Plains region of Texas. Community College A is classified as a public, small size, four-year institution offering a bachelor's degree, and is primarily a

nonresidential institution (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2014). The college enrolled 5,234 students in the 2013-2014 academic year (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2014), of which 1,054 were workforce education students. The Fall 2013 student population consisted of 45.2% White, 41.9% Hispanic, 6.7% Other, and 6.2% African American. The gender of its students was 59.2% female compared to 40.8% males (THECB, 2014).

Community College B is a public, rural-serving, medium size, two-year institution (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2014). The college enrolled 5,025 students in the 2013-2014 academic year, of which 1,763 were enrolled in workforce education (THECB, 2014). The Fall 2013 student population consisted of 56.1% Hispanic, 30.3% White, 9.01% Other, and 3.7% African American. Females comprised 62.3% of the student population compared to males at 37.7% (THECB, 2014).

Participants and Sampling

Participants in this study were four community college practitioners and four members of workforce education program advisory committees at the study institutions, for a total of eight participants. The inclusion criterion for community college practitioners was that they currently work with a workforce program at one of the two study institutions. The inclusion criteria for advisory committee members were that they currently serve on or have served on an advisory committee at one of the study institutions within the past two years.

The participants for this study were purposefully selected (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), purposeful sampling is selecting participants that best understand the research questions and problem that the study is designed to address. The

purposefully selected participants were the best sources of information available to address the research questions for this study (Creswell, 2014). Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to focus on a small sample population (Patton, 2002) who embodied the same characteristics in education and business and industry, and who had a direct affiliation with an advisory committee (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002).

Data Collection

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information to enable research questions to be answered (Patton, 2002). The data is typically gathered using experiments, observing and recording events, attaining data from management information systems, and administering surveys (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The most commonly used methods of data collection in qualitative research are the researcher as the primary instrument through which the data is collected, in-depth interviews, observations, and document review (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher is the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and may probe and ask the participants to clarify their answers as well as request detailed explanations of information given (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In-depth interviews are an additional data collection instruction in qualitative research. Interviews are a secure conversation between the researcher and the participant that can be used to gain insight into specific experiences (Patton, 2002). A common form of interviews used in qualitative research is the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews use a series of open-ended questions designed to guide the conversation (Patton, 2002). The questions are normally broad, allowing the participants and researcher to expand on the questions and responses if compelled to do so. Semi-

structured interviews provide the participants the opportunity to cover the topic in detail and expand on information that the researcher finds relevant to the research questions (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). This allows for information-rich responses from the participants that enables the researcher to gain details (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and opens the discussion for variances in answers by the participants (Maxwell, 2005).

Existing documents are an additional data collection tool used in qualitative research. Creswell (2014) explains that documents in the form of public or private information may be collected during the research. Public documents consist of newspapers, minutes of meetings, and reports from meetings (Creswell, 2014). Private documents include letters, emails, and personal notes.

Field notes are also a data collection tool used in qualitative research. The researcher takes detailed field notes (Patton, 2002) to provide an account of the researcher's experiences. Many times these notes are used to capture observations during the interviews. They are also used throughout the data collection processes to document additional data, insights, themes, and ideas as they begin to emerge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The data collection tools used for this study included: 1) the lens of the researcher; 2) semi-structured interviews; 3) documents collected about the advisory committee meetings at the study institutions; and 4) researcher field notes. An interview protocol was used to guide the semi-structured interview process. The guide outlined the processes of the interview and the open-ended questions that were asked. According to Merriam (2009), using a protocol provides structure and increases the researcher's confidence during the interview. Including the specific questions in the guide aided the

researcher with the organization of thoughts, taking of notes, and the ability to stay focused during the interviews (Creswell, 2014). The interviews were conducted as informal, having a conversational feel to help the participants gain a sense of value and ease to share information (James, 2007). The interviews were one-on-one and were conducted either face-to-face or through the telephone if the researcher was unable to meet with the participant personally (Patton, 2002). Face-to-face interviews can take advantage of social cues, such as voice, body language, and tone of the participant (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), interviews should be audio recorded if possible as it is difficult to write down every word and quote as well as remember details of an interview, which can lead to inaccurate accounts of data. It is important that the researcher record the narrative exactly as described by the participant's explanation, including the details regarding his/her actions (Patton, 2002).

The data collected was used to gain an understanding of the strategies used by advisory members and colleges and report those findings so others might benefit from them. The data collection occurred through observations during semi-structured interviews that were captured in field notes, written data, and oral data that were used to contribute to the overall findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher also took detailed field notes (Patton, 2002) to provide an account of the researcher's experiences.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is making sense out of the text and data by taking it apart and putting the data back together (Creswell, 2014). The data analysis processes utilized in this study involved transcribing the interviews, coding the interview transcriptions for any identifiable patterns by participants, re-reading interviews for clarity, identifying

meaning, seeking perspectives and phenomenon, and constructing an overall meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A method of data analysis used in qualitative research is constant comparative coding and was used in this study to analyze the data. Constant comparative data analysis is comparing existing data with new, incoming data (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2001). During the interview process data was continuously analyzed, constantly comparing one string of data to another, referred to as constant comparison analysis (Creswell, 2014). After reading through the interviews, the researcher coded the data with highlighters, identifying common themes. Additionally, descriptive wording was turned into categories, and similar statements were identified and classified (Creswell, 2014). In addition to the interview transcriptions, the researcher organized and transcribed the field notes and saved them on a personal computer (Creswell, 2014). The data in the field notes were also analyzed utilizing the constant comparative method and open coding.

The researcher identified both expected and unexpected findings and recognized codes that were both usual and unusual (Creswell, 2014). Coding is organizing, classifying, and interpreting the research data into manageable categories (Creswell, 2014). The data was then labeled with descriptive codes in order to decipher and identify meaning (Creswell, 2014). Open coding was used to organize the data into broad categories, then axial coding, putting data together in a new way to make connections, was used to interpret and understand the open codes (Merriam, 2009).

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is the realization the research is worthy of attention. To substantiate rigor and validity of the research, the researcher established trustworthiness throughout the conduction of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be established by using consistent and accurate information from the data collected and the analysis of this data (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2001). It is necessary to establish trustworthiness to assure the researcher and the users of the information that the findings reflect the goal of the research, rather than any biases (Patton, 2002). In order to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research, the researcher sought credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) of the study.

In qualitative research, credibility is one of the most important components (Shenton, 2004). Credibility in qualitative research assures that the researcher represents the participant's words accurately and correctly (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the credibility of this study, member checking and triangulation were used. Member checking is used to allow participants an opportunity to review the researcher's analysis of the data and the findings (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All participants were provided a copy of their transcripts from their interviews and were asked to review them for accuracy (Creswell, 2014). In addition, triangulation was used to ensure the findings were credible (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation is "to collect information about different events and relationships from different points of view" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 31). The interview transcripts, field notes, and documents from

the advisory committees were analyzed to justify the themes as they emerged (Creswell, 2014).

Transferability involves the ability of the researcher to provide descriptive information of the study's context and findings in order for the research audience to be able to apply them to their own context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher utilized rich, thick description of the participant's words in the findings of the study, including direct quotes and statements (Altheide & Johnson, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in order for the research audience to make judgments about their applicability to their context.

Dependability assures the results are consistent and if the research study was replicated that it would produce the same results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Dependability in qualitative research allows the transcription of the notes to be checked for mistakes while transcribing the field notes and interpreting the findings (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This also ensures the readers that the proper research practices are followed and a thorough detailed account of the design and implementation, a description of the data gathering, and an evaluation of the interviews has been conducted (Shenton, 2004). Rich, thick description and reflexive journaling were used to help ensure the dependability of the conduction of this study, supporting the dependability of the research process.

Confirmability refers to the quality of the research and the accuracy of the field notes, transcription, and overall understanding of the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014). Confirmability in qualitative study is the degree others can uphold and confirm the information (Merriam, 2009). This study used triangulation, member

checking, and reflexive journaling to help ensure the confirmability of the study's findings (Creswell, 2014, Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Context of the Study and Researcher

Context of the Study

The study sites were two West Texas community colleges located in the South Plains region of Texas. Community College A is a public, small size, four-year institution offering a bachelor's degree, and is primarily a nonresidential institution (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2014). In the 2013-2014 academic year, the college enrolled 1,054 workforce education students (THECB, 2014). Community College B is a public, rural-serving, medium size, two-year institution (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2014). In the 2013-2014 academic year, the college enrolled 1,763 workforce education students (THECB, 2014).

Context of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher is the main instrument for data collection in qualitative research, as the study is shaped by the researcher's experiences (Merriam, 2009). I have 20 years of educational experience, including teaching the deaf, reading and recording for the blind, teaching students with special needs, teaching at public and private institutions, seven years at a community college in the West Texas area, and my current position working with business and industry as a market research analyst for an oil service company. All of these combined experiences have contributed to the individual I am today and have made an impact upon my life.

Working towards a doctorate is a lifelong dream and is a way to help students attain the educational resources and opportunities lacking in areas. My doctoral

experience opened the door to serve as dean of a rural satellite community college in West Texas. I began to use what I was learning in my coursework to identify student needs, seek funding, and expand the college. Working with a community that went out of their way to provide services to under-served students was my first experience with advisory committees. As I attempted to gain funding and support to provide programs students and the community needed, I inadvertently became involved with advisory committee participants without realizing at the time the importance and support they provided. The advisory committees were instrumental in finding and securing funding, facilities, instructors, resources, advice and ideas for the students and community of the small West Texas college. This personal experience and knowledge I gained as dean with advisory committees aided in the questioning of participants, as did my current position and involvement with the oil and gas industry of West Texas. I am interested in using the information gained from this study to lead rural educational organizations in need of transformation.

Summary

This study was conducted through a qualitative collective case study through the lens of the naturalistic paradigm to examine the decision-making process of advisory committees who are responsible for guiding workforce programs at community colleges in West Texas. The researcher utilized a conceptual framework to understand the committee's decision-making practices that allow the committee to function at their highest level. Each participant was purposefully selected to intentionally represent a small number of expert practitioners in the field of workforce advisory committees. The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to go in-depth and probe existing

professionals working in the field to share their experiences and shed light on their successes and challenges. Their collective unique experiences shaped the outcome of this study and provided valuable information for other community college workforce programs.

Specifically, the study sought to understand and provide meaning on the particular events, actions, and situations which workforce advisory committees are presented with on a daily basis (Maxwell, 2005). The interviews allowed the researcher to understand the process and challenges the committees undertake to come to agreements. The study also examined the challenges presented to advisory committees. Further, this study identified those challenges and pinpointed some of the strategies used by the participants that have fostered successful outcomes. Specifically, the data collected from the participants, through interviews, allowed the researcher to determine how members of the advisory committees decide which programs to add, remove, or modify and their justification to stakeholders. Results of this study will contribute to the practice of higher education and the body of knowledge used by community college workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Chapter IV will present the findings from the analyzed data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter IV presents the results of the study. The topics that will be discussed include: 1) summary of the research design; 2) overview of the study institutions and participant profiles; and 3) the study's findings. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific foci were the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process. This study will contribute to the practice of higher education and the body of knowledge used by community college workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs.

This study was guided by four research questions:

1. What do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are effective practices and strategies in the decision making process related to workforce programs?
2. What do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are the challenges to working collaboratively?
3. How do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive the decision-making processes of business and industry impact the decisions made for workforce education programs?

4. What recommendations do community college practitioners and advisory committee members have for collaborative decision-making?

Summary of the Research Design

This qualitative study was conducted through the lens of the naturalistic paradigm. A paradigm is the beliefs and values the research community accepts to guide the actions of the research (Creswell, 2014), and is the individual's perspective and the relationships with it (Denzin, 1994). Using the naturalistic paradigm, the researcher assumed the realities constructed by participants are interrelated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A collective case study research design was used to focus on the perceptions and experiences of the study participants in relation to decision-making and best practices for community college workforce education advisory committees. Multiple cases were used to collect in-depth data (Merriam, 2009), allowing the research to reveal different perspectives related to the issue (Creswell, 2014). The data collection steps included setting the boundaries of the study, gathering information through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and establishing the procedures for recording the information (Creswell, 2014). Before collecting data for this study, approval was sought from the Texas Tech University Human Subjects Review Board. The study began after this approval was received (see Appendix A).

Data Collection Process

There were multiple methods of data collection utilized in this study. The first step in the data collection process was establishing the boundaries for this collective case study. The boundaries were set by focusing the study on two community colleges located in the South Plains region of Texas. The study was also bounded by focusing on

participants who were involved in workforce education programs at the two study institutions, either as department chairpersons of a workforce program or an advisory member from business and industry. The instruments for data collection were the researcher and semi-structured interviews that were conducted in-person or by phone, documents, and field notes. Documents included advisory committee meeting agendas, notes regarding anticipated changes in program requirements, and prior meeting minutes.

The first step in the data collection process of the study was to contact the two public, rural-serving community colleges located in the South Plains region of West Texas that served as the study institutions. Both institutions have workforce programs in an area of West Texas affected by a sudden expansion and growth in the communities due to extensive growth in the business and industry fields.

An email explaining the study, along with participant inclusion criteria (see Appendix B) and a Description of the Study document (see Appendix C), were sent to the Dean of Applied Technology at Community College A and the Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness at Community College B, requesting their approval to conduct the study at their institution, and to request their assistance in identifying an institutional contact to help with the conduction of the study. Both individuals agreed to have the study conducted at their institution.

There were two groups of participants in this study. The first was college participants. The inclusion criteria for the college participants included that they part of programs that used advisory committees to make informed decisions for workforce programs, and that they had been employed within the community college system in a workforce program in Texas for at least two years. This requirement was needed to

ensure the college participants possessed a strong background and familiarity with advisory committees and workforce program requirements within the state of Texas. The second group was advisory member participants. The inclusion criterion for them was that they currently serve on or have served on an advisory committee at one of the study institutions within the past two years at the time of this study.

The Dean of Applied Technology at Community College A identified two potential workforce department chairs as participants for the study and forwarded them the study information, which included information on how to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating. The workforce department chairs from Automotive and Diesel Applied Technology and Information Technology agreed by email to participate in the study. Interview dates and times were set up through email with both participants. The researcher introduced herself to the participants by phone prior to the interviews and discussed the location for the interviews. The two participants provided a list of names to the researcher of three advisory committee members who they recommended as possible participants for this study. The department chair participants contacted the potential advisory committee member participants by email or phone to request their assistance in participating in this study, and provided them the study information. Of the list of potential advisory committee member participants, two agreed to participate as well as to having their contact information provided to the researcher. The two potential advisory member participants were then contacted by the researcher by email to follow up on their interest to participate in the study and by phone to confirm exact time, date, and place of the interviews.

The Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness at Community College B assigned a point of contact to use to identify potential participants for the study. The point of contact was the Dean of Career, Technical, and Workforce Education. The Dean was contacted through email to set up a discussion time and date and to seek his assistance in forwarding the study information to potential participants who met the inclusion criteria for the study. The Dean agreed to assist with the study and identified two potential participants who he forwarded the study information to by email. Both of the individuals agreed to participate in the study and followed up with the researcher by email to confirm their willingness. The researcher scheduled interview dates, times, and locations with the two participants through phone conversations. After each interview, the two department chair participants each identified advisory committee members to contact for the study. Each department chair participant then contacted the two potential advisory member participants by email and provided them the study information (see Appendix E). Both of the advisory committee members agreed to participate in the study and agreed that their contact information could be provided to the researchers. After receiving the contact information by email from the department chair participants, the researcher contacted the two advisory committee members first by email and then by phone to verify date, time, and location of interviews.

The following procedures were used for all participants. Prior to each interview, participants were emailed the Interview Guide for In-Person Interviews (see Appendices F and G), which included the interview questions, and also an additional copy of the Description of the Study document. Both department chair participants at Community College A were interviewed on-site at the institution. Both advisory committee member

participants from Community College A were interviewed by phone at their request due to time restraints. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on-site at Community College B with both department chair participants. The first advisory committee member participant was interviewed by phone and the second at his place of business.

Prior to beginning the interviews, all of the participants had the opportunity to ask questions pertaining to the study. When provided the opportunity to select a pseudonym for the study, all participants declined to select one so one was assigned for them. A similar interview protocol was followed with each participant, which consisted of an introduction; informal conversation; and an overview, explanation, and review of the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014). Participants were verbally notified that participation was voluntary, interview questions could be skipped, and the interview could be stopped at any time. All eight participants were asked permission to audio record their interviews. All but one of the participants allowed audio recording of the interview; one participant abstained from recordings. The one participant's interview was documented through detailed and copious notes. In addition, field notes were taken during the interviews of all of the participants. As needed, follow-up questions were asked to elicit clarification or to gain greater depth and quality information from the participants. The interviews varied in length from 40 minutes to 90 minutes due to the individual personality of the participants and their enthusiasm to share detailed information, their experiences and knowledge, and their degree of interest in the topic of advisory committee decision-making and best practices. At the end of each interview, gratitude was expressed for the participant's time, input, and participation.

A third party transcriptionist was contracted to transcribe verbatim the audio-recorded interviews. The transcription process was completed within two weeks of each interview. The transcriptions were then closely reviewed and matched with the audio recording to ensure an exact match occurred and an accurate reflection was presented. The transcriptions were further reviewed for typographical errors and compared to field notes to expose any inconsistencies. In addition, participants were provided the transcription of their interview and were asked to review and provide edits and/or corrections. Of the eight participants, one advisory member asked to clarify one statement, no other participants made any changes to their interview transcription. In addition, reflexive journaling took place throughout the research process to monitor and record any researcher bias, aiding in assessing interview transcripts, during the interviews, and field notes with an open mind (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

Data Analysis Process

Data analysis for this study was conducted manually without the use of computer software. To begin the data analysis process, the constant-comparative method was utilized to analyze the data collected and continued throughout the data analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interview transcripts and field notes were read numerous times to gain an understanding of the participants' perceptions and experiences. All data from interview transcripts, documents consisting of advisory committee meeting agendas, notes regarding anticipated changes in program requirements, and prior meeting minutes, and field notes were constantly compared. During comparison of the data, notes were made of key terms and phrases, as well as similarities and differences among the data

began to emerge as themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Throughout the data analysis process a more thorough understanding of the data formed. Once this understanding was formed, the data was coded utilizing open coding (Creswell, 2014).

Open coding began with a line-by-line evaluation of the data (Saldaña, 2009), color-coding key experiences, phrases, and words with assigned colors. Colors were outlined on a sheet of paper indicating what each color symbolized in the data. The data was reviewed numerous times and grouped by colors into broad categories (Merriam, 2009), combining similar data. The data was analyzed numerous times, which led to the data being placed into general groups and integrated into broad categories (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). These general groups were then analyzed and the formation of distinct themes and categories emerged (Creswell, 2014). After open coding was completed, axial coding was utilized to interpret and make meaning from open codes, categorizing similarly coded data, sorting, and re-labeling the data into conceptual categories (Saldaña, 2009). The data collected from the interviews, existing advisory committee documents, and the researcher's field notes were triangulated to ensure establishment of valid and comprehensive themes (Creswell, 2014).

Study Institutions and Participant Profiles

Study Institutions

The settings for this study were two West Texas public community colleges located in the South Plains region of Texas. Community College A is classified as a public, small size, four-year institution offering a bachelor's degree, and is primarily a nonresidential institution (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2014). The college enrolled 5,234 students in the 2013-2014 academic year (Texas Higher

Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2014), of which 1,054 were workforce education students. The Fall 2013 student population consisted of 45.2% White, 41.9% Hispanic, 6.7% Other, and 6.2% African American. The gender of its students was 59.2% female compared to 40.8% males (THECB, 2014).

Community College B is a public, rural-serving, medium size, two-year institution (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2014). The college enrolled 5,025 students in the 2013-2014 academic year, of which 1,763 were enrolled in workforce education (THECB, 2014). The Fall 2013 student population consisted of 56.1% Hispanic, 30.3% White, 9.01% Other, and 3.7% African American. Females comprised 62.3% of the student population compared to males at 37.7% (THECB, 2014).

Participant Profiles

There were a total of eight participants in this study. The first set of participants was two workforce department chairs from Community College A and two workforce department chairs from Community College B. For the purposes of reporting and discussing the findings, these individuals will be referred to as department chair participants. The second set of participants was four advisory committee members, two each from each workforce department chair's program from Community College A and Community College B. These participants will be referred to as advisory committee participants in the reporting and discussion of the findings. The profiles of the participants follow.

Alex is the department chairperson at Community College A for the Applied Technology Division, overseeing the automotive and diesel technicians programs. At the time of this study, he had been in this position for three years. Alex has 20 years of

experience in business and industry, working with automotive and diesel engines. He is responsible for starting the advisory committee in his department at the college.

Pam is the department chairperson for the Applied Technology Division at Community College A. She oversees the information technology programs and at the time of this study, had three years of experience as department chair and 10 years of experience with the college. Prior to working for the college, Pam worked as an information technology manager in the same community as the community college is located, for seven years. The advisory committee was already established when Pam started working at the college.

Chuck is an advisory member participant for the automotive and diesel technician advisory program for Community College A. At the time of this study, he had been a member of the committee for three years. He has 14 years of experience in business and industry as the human resource manager for a major global supplier of heavy equipment and engines. He presently serves on three different advisory committees for community colleges and a university.

Tom serves on the information technology advisory committee at Community College A and at the time of this study, had served on this committee for five years. He has 13 years of managerial experience, working in the surrounding communities in information technology. Tom is a prior student of Community College A, receiving an associate's degree and going on to earn his bachelor's degree at a local university.

Jackie is the department chairperson overseeing the criminal justice programs for Community College B. At the time of this study, she has held this position for three years. Prior to working for the college, Jackie worked in the local community in the

criminal justice area, and had worked with all members of the current program advisory committee prior to her employment with the college. Jackie started the criminal justice advisory committee at Community College B.

Brittany serves on the criminal justice advisory committee at Community College B and has for the past two years at the time of this study. She has worked with the local community for 20 years and has taught as an adjunct for the college for two years. Prior to serving on the advisory committee, Brittany worked with Jackie in the local criminal justice offices.

Byron serves as the department chairperson for the welding, machine, and survey programs at Community College B. In his chair role, he oversees three different advisory committees, which at the time of this study, he has done for the past 17 years. Byron has worked as a manager in local welding and machine shops for 15 years prior to moving to the college. He has extensive working relationships with the area shop owners and businesses within the community. Byron is responsible for starting all three advisory committees.

Mike serves on all three of Byron's advisory committees for the welding, machine, and survey programs at Community College B, and at the time of this study, had for the past 17 years. He has 27 years of experience as a manager and owner of a machine products company in the local community that the community college serves.

Findings

Effective Practices and Strategies in Decision-Making

Research question one sought to understand what community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are effective practices and strategies in the

decision making process related to workforce programs. Key individuals have the ability to influence a group to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2013). The advisory committee represents the local community as the voice of business and industry. The members have already established respect and trust of the stakeholders, and are better prepared to handle the leadership roles and achieve results for the committee (Carlson et al., 2011). The analyses of the data collected to address this research question produced three main themes: 1) voice of business and industry; 2) equal representation and balance; and 3) decision-making process.

Voice of business and industry. All of the participants discussed their role and duty as members of the community college program advisory committee to give input and advice by being the voice of business and industry. Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) explained how the advisory board committee members from industry offer a business perspective to the college and the overall aspects, expectations, and needs of the community. Jackie (Community College B, department chair participant) explained that the committee utilizes its business and industry skills to form recommendations for accreditation, curriculum, adding and replacing classes, degree plan changes, and program adjustments in order for the college's program to best meet the needs of the community and local industries.

Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) shared that he ensures that all who may be affected by the offerings of the workforce programs he oversees at the college are invited to meetings. He explained that he makes "sure everyone is included in the discussions and invited to the meetings. Small independents show up but don't speak up. We have to all play our part and speak up to represent our own needs."

Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) and Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) both oversee the areas of welding, machine, and surveying programs at their institutions. Both agreed that since there is a strong welding community presence in the area that their institutions serve, it is imperative that the college works closely with the majority of businesses in town. Mike, the owner of a welding and machine shop (Community College B, advisory member participant) supported their perceptions when stating:

It is important that everyone [all welding shop representatives] comes to the table together because sometimes we cannot see past our noses. We are so focused on our own product and world we don't see someone else's needs. For example, there are different types of welding used in the shops. The college has to be careful not to train only on the equipment that might be of limited use in one area. If that company wants possible employees trained on it then they need to donate that piece of equipment to the school and supply training by partnering with the college. It's a two way street.

It has become an effective practice to include and work with the majority of businesses in the community and making decisions based on equal representation of all community businesses regardless of size. Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) and Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) as described above, perceived that the advisory committee needs to open their platform to others and find out what type of services they can provide for the community as a whole and not just those who attend meetings. If the advisory committee is to serve and represent the needs of the local community, they have to find out exactly what those

needs are and then voice them to the committee to act on as a whole. An effective advisory committee represents the majority and not just the few when using best practices in their decision-making process to produce an effective workforce program providing services for the community it serves.

Not all businesses operate using the same skill sets and not all students are being trained just to provide services for one type of operation. The college is matching the skills required within the community and incorporating them into their program with the help of the advisory committee. Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) oversees automotive and diesel programs at the college. He explained the role of advisory committee members for the programs he oversees. Alex stated that “The advisory members act as the voice of the industry and help set the skills needed for the program.” In order for the college to adjust its program curriculum to what the community needs are, business and industry must voice what their concerns and needs are to the committee so they can contemplate and make informed decisions. As Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant) stated, "This gives business and industry a chance to be vocal and express if the program is meeting the competencies and match the skills that are necessary for employment.” He went on to explain:

We come in and advise the school [college] if they need to boost a program or add and develop a new area. The college shows us the curriculum they are using to provide the specific skill sets and we provide input, not only at the meetings, but we go as far as to provide the college and the students’ access to our specs to incorporate our requirements into their training. Let me give you an example, there are 64,000 positions open in the industry for diesel engine technicians, not

all of the students will meet those standards but there is a job for them somewhere in the industry. We are not the only business in town but as the advisory committee, we advise the college so all the students will be employable somewhere, even if they don't fit my [company name] particular standards.

Byron (Community College B, department chair participant), Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant), and Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) agreed that advisory members and community businesses must speak up and voice their individual needs for their companies regarding welders and machinist, as it gives the committee an opportunity to hear whether the program and the product they are producing is meeting the industry needs overall. The decision-making process as described above is crucial to creating a sustainable economic growth with the advisory committee and the community. The collaboration between the community college workforce program and business and industry aligns job training with current economic workforce needs, in turn generating significant numbers of employed workers.

Equal representation and balance. A major theme that emerged in the analysis of the data related to research question one was that not all businesses had equal representation on the advisory committee because of their size. All eight of the participants agreed that participation and speaking-up in the advisory meeting was crucial to the overall success of the work of the advisory committee and program. Pam (Community College A, department chair participant) explained, "We have a good environment, everyone gets to talk and share ideas. Balance requires transparency, accountability, and inclusion. Glory hogs are not invited back." Pam makes sure everyone gets a chance to speak up by controlling the environment and giving everyone

an opportunity to voice his or her opinion. Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) explained similar thoughts as Pam's as he stated, "We invite all these companies and then they don't show. Then small independents show up but don't speak up. We have to all play our part." Alex reiterates the importance of everyone participating in the discussion. Otherwise, the committee does not know their industry needs. To confront the issue of nonparticipants, Pam and Alex agreed a strong vocal leader is needed in the meetings to help keep the meetings focused and running smoothly.

Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant) went into detail, agreeing with Pam and Alex, but expanded on including members of authority saying:

The committee needs to be well rounded and represented by large corporations and mom and pop businesses. If they don't come be the voice for those businesses, we have no idea what their specific needs are. We are focused on the functional side of business and want those decision-makers on the committee that have the authority to hire and fire. We want members that have years of experience and maturity behind them and we all act as a voice for our industry, regardless of size.

Tom (Community College A, advisory member participant) recommended having a diverse group on the advisor committee or risking "the loudest voices and [those with] more representation will take over the meeting." Tom commented in order to have a committee work to its fullest advantage, "let an open and honest discussion take place with no time limits so everyone can give their input." He perceived "you need one contractor for one technology individual" on the committee. Tom also pointed out that all committee members should be experts in the field because in his field, information

technology, the information changes so quickly and so no one thinks they are wasting their time giving antiquated information. He stated, "The majority of members like to listen to others ideas because they are dealing in the same industry situations."

Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) agreed with Tom's point, that it is necessary to "include and encourage the small independents to not just show up [at committee meetings] but participate so they are represented." However, Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) disagreed with having no time limits and allowing everyone to speak. She thought the agenda should be strictly enforced at the meetings so members did not use their personal agendas and take over the meetings. She went on to explain that "The meetings need structure and a time limit for speaking, otherwise, members just start complaining about problems and get off task." She shared that, "we deal with lawyers on our committee and it is sometimes difficult to get a balance of all perspectives." Jackie (Community College B, department chair participant), who is on the same advisory committee with Brittany, had a different view of how the committee should be balanced. Jackie commented, "I like to keep the advisory meetings light and conversational, not too formal and not too many rules and procedures." This was an interesting finding as Brittany (advisory committee member) and Jackie (department chair) are involved with the same committee, but have opposite views on balance and representation. Jackie further commented on the balance of members on the advisory committee, "We only want members there that want to be – they are informal. I don't have the personality to make people participate – I just wish they would." While Brittany noted that she perceived more discussions and structure is needed to get more involvement from members. Jackie did not want anyone to feel

uncomfortable and just thought the meetings would move at their own pace and let leaders emerge. Neither Jackie nor Brittany were happy with the contributions of their advisory committee, but were just accepting it as it was in hopes it would be more effective in the future since it had only been in existence for a few years.

Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) noted that he is part of an extremely efficient advisory committee and had been working with many of the members for 17 years. He did comment that there were strong personalities on the committee, which leads him to take a no nonsense approach to the meetings. He stated, “If members don’t show up – I take them off.” He went on to note that “People on a rant are the worst on a committee. They just want to complain about the youth and I don’t want to listen to it – I am committed to the youth.” To Byron, a balanced advisory committee is represented by members that can get along, are there to help the students, know how to troubleshoot, and communicate. Since Byron worked in the welding community for 15 years prior to coming to the college, he knows the majority of small business owners and managers in the community and relies on their help on the advisory committee. He has had no problem finding members who are willing to serve and share their knowledge and advice.

Decision-making process. All of the participants mentioned and agreed that the workforce programs should be built around values, professionalism, ethics, and core values; and the advisory members use this as they make decisions for the program.

Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant), Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant), and Tom (Community College A, advisory member participant) all acknowledged that the advisory committee was a representation

of them as businesses and industry in the community, and the decisions they make reflect on their personal businesses, so they do not make decisions without giving thorough consideration to the issues. The advisory member participants were all proud to be on the advisory committee for the college program and put as much into the decision-making at these meetings as they do at their own business. Pam (Community College A, department chair participant) was quick to point out that community colleges are used to making hard decisions. She went on to say, "We know what tough times are and are used to working on a tight budget." Pam explained how the department uses the downturn in the economy to its advantage to acquire needed equipment with the assistance of the advisory committee members:

This may seem harsh, but our advisory members let me know when a business is going under. I just pick up the phone and call the company. Sometimes they give us their equipment or request payment but at a base bargain price and it gives them some kind of income. The advisory committee members are the ones that network and let me know who to go after.

The advisory members make decisions every day running and managing their companies. They know how to analyze a situation, weigh their options, and then react. For example, Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant) stated, "We are producing the technicians not the mechanics of the world." He compared the decisions made by the advisory committee as falling into business models he learned in college and using those same techniques with the advisory process. Chuck explained as a committee, we want to answer, "Are the skill sets we are responsible for creating with the college going to create revenue for the student and the companies?" The decision-

making the advisory members use is the same they would make for their own companies as they enjoy the productive years, but are cautious to plan carefully in case of downturns in the industry. Chuck further explained, “the decisions we make are not just building for tomorrow but we are building for the next generation by managing for the good times to take care of the down times.” In the West Texas area the economic climate can change quickly and as Chuck pointed out, the advisory committee is careful with the funds they spend just like at their own companies. As shown above, Chuck is proud of his company and the contribution he makes to the advisory committee. The decisions the advisory committee makes are not made without thorough consideration for the students and the college. The members realize they are connected and responsible for the decisions and recommendations they make to the college and do not take them lightly.

Alex and Pam (Community College A, department chair participants) and Tom (Community College A, advisory member participant) reiterated the sentiments that making good decisions comes down to confidence and the belief in the committee’s ability to make decisions as a collective group of experts. Advisory member participants expressed overwhelmingly that by holding fast to tenacity, perseverance, and consistently evaluating as a committee - then the overall decision will be successful.

All of the participants agreed decision-making was one of the most difficult tasks of their roles on the committee. Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) stated, “Being on the advisory committee, you have to know what to ask, how to ask it, and assess what the actual needs are in a community – this is decision-making.” Even though all the advisory members agreed decision-making for another entity was difficult, they all possessed the confidence to make the decisions for the

college because of their years of experience and proven track records. Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) explained that “Decision-making is something that comes with experience and time.” He went on to say, “We don’t want all yes people on our committees – they keep us focused and accountable for the decisions made in committee and the impact of those decisions.”

Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) explained making decisions is easier with an advisory committee. Since decision-making is difficult, especially when dealing with a tight budget and every decision comes at a great cost to the program. New funds may not come in readily; therefore, the advisory committee has to make every dollar count. Alex stated that "I have the trust and understanding of the members and they want to help me out." He further clarified by saying “I don't have to make those decisions alone, I have the committee to steer me and back me up." Since Alex has 17 years of experience working with the college and 20 years of experience in the industry, he has gained the respect and trust of the members. He also realizes the benefit of the advisory committee standing with him, while making hard decisions and supporting what is decided.

Summary of effective practices and strategies in decision-making. This section addressed the findings for research question one, which sought to address the participants’ perceptions of the effective practices and strategies for decision-making in community college workforce education programs. The participants agreed that they were acting as the voice for their programs and the size of the company and number of employees was irrelevant to having a voice in the industry. They also perceived that a focus should be given to everyone’s product in the community, not just those individual

who speak up the loudest or give the most money. Another theme that emerged was the current advice and standards that business and industry could share with the college. The advisory member participants expressed that they are the direct connection to the economy, and what is relevant in business and industry and the connection to the college is a reciprocal relationship. Business and industry share their knowledge, expertise, funding, and equipment to the college out of commitment to the community. The connection the community college has with business and industry through the collaboration is employable graduates to the company who have the specific skill sets developed and ready for entry into the workforce without further training required. Finally, the participants all perceived that the advisory committee has a responsibility to present knowledgeable and informed decisions for the college. The committee ultimately is responsible for the decisions they make and implement and the success of the program depends upon the accuracy of those decisions and advice.

The benefit of the advisory committee working together as one unit creates a united committee that can draw upon experts in their field. The individuals are then working as a collective group for the benefit of the workforce program without any one individual having complete responsibility or authority. The decision-making of the advisory committee is made using thorough understanding of the economic disposition of the community and sustainability of the decision.

Challenges to Working Collaboratively

Research question two sought to understand what community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceived were the challenges to working collaboratively. The analyses of the data produced three themes: 1) lack of knowledge

regarding educational system; 2) hiring employees and completers; and 3) workforce respect and trust.

Lack of knowledge regarding educational system. The first theme that emerged relative to research question two was that there is a lack of knowledge among advisory committee members about educational system and how it operates. This theme was focused around the specific laws, regulations, and policies associated with community colleges and its regulatory agencies such as the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Pam (Community College A, department chair participant) pointed out:

Colleges do not specialize in just one area like business and industry. Each program teaches the fundamentals in all areas that are transferable. Business and industry are known to be able to change quickly in order to keep up with current market needs. The college sticks to their mission statement and strategic planning.

Business and industry partners are not all informed about the rules governing a program from the THECB and SACS. The advisory committee members rely on the department chair and college administration to help guide them during meetings. Alex and Pam (Community College A, department chair participants) both agreed that the advisory members just see the regulatory side as part of the process. They both noted that the advisory members do not comment on governing factors, they just accept what the college tells them. Mike and Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participants) alluded to their lack of understanding of the rules and how this can inhibit the committee from helping the college excel to their fullest potential by using the rules

to their advantage. Brittany shared that the more experience one has serving on the committee “they begin to have a better understanding – these are people with strong business backgrounds and can really help.”

Another challenge that was discussed within this theme was the advisory committee itself. Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) and Jackie (Community College B, department chair participant) both agreed that the majority of committee members, when asked to join and serve on the committee had no idea what the duty or function was of the committee. Brittany explained that “most members on the advisory committee are not sure what their job was and what they are to do.” She went on to suggest that “We need some type of instruction manual and description of duties to know the parameters and specifics up front so we know what we can do and do not waist our time.” She perceives that most of the committee members are more than happy to help and to be on the committee, but have little idea of what the education system allows them to do or how to go about doing it. The advisory committee member participants all agreed that they enjoy being on the committee and were honored to be asked to serve on the committee, but agreed they were unsure of their duties prior to joining.

Jackie (Community College B, department chair participant) and Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) offered an additional challenge related to some of the experiences they had encountered working with the advisory committee members that were not in the education realm. Jackie and Brittany both work with judges, lawyers, and attorneys on their committee and perceive it is difficult for the committee members to separate themselves from their working environment when they

are at meetings. Brittany commented, “The members work against each other in the courtroom and some of the members are difficult to work with because they have an elitist personality.” Both Jackie and Brittany pointed out that each member on the committee viewed issues from his or her own perspective instead of seeing the whole picture and looking at the educational values. Some of these advisory committee members are used to working in the courtroom together under a hierarchy system that is difficult for the members to switch out of during the meetings. Brittany stated “This structure makes it difficult to have an open and transparent discussion during meetings.” She went on to clarify that the advisory members were restrained with their comments, because they did not want to offend individuals who they worked with by bringing up controversial discussions. An example was shared by both Brittany and Jennifer who explained that they perceive that attorneys may see things in black and white and may not be open negotiating. This leads to the concern that the progress of the committee could be impeded and prevent it from being as successful as it could be.

Hiring employees and completers. The second theme that emerged relative to research question two was the hiring of employees and college completers. The analysis of the data indicated a definite division in perceptions on this topic between the advisory member participants and the department chair participants. Of concern was the hiring of students who quickly develop specific skills and leave college to take employment before completing a college credential. The department chair participants all expressed a great concern with students dropping out at the final phase of the program because of the enticements offered by local employers and the realization of students that their skills were valuable and equated to money. All of the department chairs participants

acknowledged that they are quick to explain to their advisory committee members the need for completers and the harm that occurs to the college and their program when businesses and industry hire students away before completing the program. This was referenced as a “double-edged sword” as the goal of the program is to employ students with the skills gained at the college, yet the program can be flagged by the state for poor performance due to the numbers of non-completers. Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) shared that through discussions of this issue within the advisory committee meeting, he offered that his company would subsequently pay the remaining college tuition for all students completing their training and would also agree to modify their hours so that it did not interfere with classes, if they were employed by his company. The department chair participants agreed that being transparent regarding the college needs was important and they ensured this by further communicating with advisory committee members before and after meetings.

As further evidence of the commitment of the advisory committee members to the community and the college, Mike shared that around five years ago the majority of business and industry managers and owners in the local community decided through the advisory committee meetings, to pool their resources together to all support the program at Community College B. According to Mike:

I discussed with members of the advisory committee several years ago that we would split up and go to every machine and welding shop in the community and give them a choice to either donate the equipment to the college they wanted employees trained on or they needed to give a monetary donation. By donating equipment to the college they would have students trained with their specific

skills and ready for employment immediately upon completion. The committee quickly raised around \$40,000.00 for the college. Businesses all began to work as a cohesive group, this eliminated the problem we were having of companies siphoning off employees from other companies - they all saw the logic. Training students on old equipment doesn't help anyone.

Mike went on to say that this simple act years ago set the foundation for the close working relationship between the business and industry community and the college. Using his strong personality and transparency, he often visits with other businesses in town to solicit a unified behavior to support the college and its program.

A knowledgeable community dedicated to the community college and their businesses and industry in the local area supports workforce collaborations as confirmed by the statement above. Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) expressed similar sentiments as Mike when stating, "I work closely with a major corporation and they want and encourage students to have certificates and degrees." Alex and Chuck (Community College A, advisory chair participant) have a trusting and respectful relationship. Alex says, "We all stick to the plan - it's beneficial to everyone down the road." Both Alex and Chuck expressed they are committed to the program and want students to complete their full training to be successful, not only now, but for their future.

Workforce respect and trust. The final theme that emerged related to research question two was the issues of respect and trust for workforce programs. Both Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant) and Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) expressed the sentiment that their industry does not get the

same respect as programs producing doctors, yet they both perceived that their product and the training provided was vital to communities and the economy. Chuck went on to point out:

If your program is outside the academic realm, you do not get a large enough voice. Since we are not producing the Nobel Peace Prize winners, our voice is not regarded as important. So, I am a member of many committees, including the Texas Workforce Commission, so I can work as a voice outside the realm of education. The academic world decision-makers need to understand the workforce programs are just as important.

Even though Mike was in a completely different town, position, and company, he reiterated similar sentiments as Chuck relative to the stigma in society of workforce jobs:

Workforce has a stigma attached to it. This dates back to the old Vo Tech classes in high schools. Years ago there was a separation of the elite going to college to become doctors and lawyers and following in the footsteps of their fathers and grandfathers as the middle class became welders and learned a trade. The trades went to the working class and they became a productive and necessary part of the society. Otherwise, if you didn't have a trade you became a ditch digger. The problem is workforce does not toot its own horn.

Even though Chuck and Mike are passionate about the lack of respect for their industry, the same sentiment was not shared or acknowledged by the department chair participants. All of the department chair participants were proud of their programs and more than happy to boast about the progress they have made within the college, especially in the past few years.

Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) discussed the concept of trust, related to the companies and donated funds to the college. He explained that the companies in town have known him for years and have a respect and trust for him as an individual. Byron said, “I am a good steward of the funds the community trusts me with and [they] know their money go[es] to the students.” Other department chair participants also discussed issues of trust and respect.

Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant) shared an experience he had had when he had donated money to the college. He later found out that it had not gone to the program he had it for. He stated that he had given the funds from his company for “funding and support of the students and specific programs as the advisory member and I oversee the use of those funds. Not for the school to bolster their other programs.” Chuck did acknowledge, though, that he continues to respect the community college and maintains trust in the program chairs he works through.

During the data collection process, the researcher visited the Community College B’s facilities for the welding program, including the working classrooms, labs, and equipment that Byron (department chair participant) and Mike (advisory member participant) have created together through donations and close guidance with the other advisory members. It was clearly evident they had an extremely successful program. The facilities included an entire smart board wall, new hauling trailer, a new truck on the way this year, three rooms of modern equipment changed out yearly, individual welding labs, and a welding robot coming later this year. The relationship of trust and respect that the department chair and advisory committee had established through years of working succinctly together was evident in the facility.

Summary of challenges to working collaboratively. In summary, the findings for research question two indicate that there are challenges that the participants perceive affect the advisory committee working collaboratively. The first theme that emerged was the lack of understanding by the advisory members of the laws, regulations, and governance of the school. The majority of advisory committee members acknowledged that they rely heavily on employees of the college to advise them during meetings if an issue relative to regulations comes up. The findings indicated that advisory committees who had members with years of experience on the committee and who took an interest in learning the particular rules have more effective committees. Another challenge that emerged was that all of the participants expressed the challenge of lack of knowledge as to what the duties were for an advisory committee. Many of the advisory committee participants expressed they had no idea what they could do and needed to do as a member of the committee. They articulated a need for some kind of instructional guide to advise them on the purpose, procedure, and limitations of their actions taken by the committee.

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of the data related to research question two was related to employment and program completers. All of the department chair participants discussed a concern for the college of students not completing their programs, but taking new found skills and taking employment versus completing school.

The final theme that emerged related to this research question was related to respect and trust in connection with the stigma in society attached to workforce programs in general. Several advisory committee member participants explained the lack of respect and notoriety by the community and society in general for workforce programs. As active members in the community, they discussed how they use their influence and

success to promote their products and connection to the college. The department chair participants did not share the same perceptions as the advisory committee member participants relative to the respect of their programs within the community, but did acknowledge that the work of the advisory committee members in the community works to the advantage of the college because the managers have developed impressive programs partnering with the institutions. The discussion of trust revolved around the donation of funds to the program that did not go directly to the students or was distributed to other programs at the college instead of the intent of the advisory committee. The advisory committee member participants discussed their donations to the college, but also at times how they had become agitated when the college would redistribute funds to programs other than the one the funds were originally designated to. The advisory committee member participants expect and trust the college and department to be good stewards with donations and money.

Effects of Business and Industry on Workforce Programs

Research question three sought to understand how community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive the decision-making processes of business and industry affect the decisions made for workforce education programs. The analysis of the data produced three themes: 1) internships create critical thinkers; 2) advisory committees set direction of programs; and 3) support of the college.

Internships create critical thinkers. The idea of internships and working together with the college was not new to the advisory committee member participants. Pam and Alex (Community College A, department chair participants), Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant), Chuck (Community College A, advisory

member participant), and Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) all addressed that internships and working together collaboratively to make decisions about the internship experience has been going on for years, but had become more formal with the college in the past 10 years, resulting in the system that is currently in place. Chuck explained the current process:

We are the final destination for students and prepared for success. Schools have been listening to employers and what they need. With the reduction in state funding and the requirement to meet placement [completers] rates – business and industry are filling the gap. It is a win win for education and business. We [business and industry] provide the assets and technology that schools don't have the funds to share that we have available and can donate. We are providing the engines and hands-on materials schools cannot.

Chuck went on to explain that students connect their formal classroom training with real life experiences and become lifelong critical thinkers during their internship experiences. All of the eight participants explained that business and industry internships and the close connection to the college prepare the students for success. They all agreed that the internship experience helps match students with their training needs and is imperative to creating critical thinking skills in students alongside the hands-on training that the internship provides.

Byron (Community College B, department chair participant), who has 17 years with the college and another 20 working in the community, equated his successful program to the relationship he has built with business and industry over the years. He commented, “we place students with companies for life, not just one or two years. They

[student] make a career out of it.” He explained the companies trust him to train the students as critical thinkers and noted that “the student has to be able to adapt and handle many situations.” The internship experience helps the student and the company to know if they are right for each other. Byron further discussed his perceptions of the product produced by the college. He explained that the product “is the student – we put out a good product. Business and industry rely on our product to produce as they rely on supply and demand.”

From the perspective of an advisory committee member participant, Chuck noted that “we invest in the college as a long run investment and expect a return on our investment.” The relationship with the college gives us the “long term capabilities to satisfy customers and produce long-term relationships.” Through the internship experiences provided to the students, “we are producing the technical skills in the students.” The sentiments reflected from the participants about the internship experience reflect a commitment to the students and program to support life-long learners, a common goal of community colleges.

Tom (Community College A, advisory member participant) went through the information technology (IT) program at Community College A. He shared that he had “lived the experience when I went through the internship as a student. In IT you have to be a critical thinker and it led to the manager position I am in now.” Tom went on to explain that his instructors at the college talked about critical thinking, but at the time he did not fully understand the connection until he went through his internship and connected the training with his job and the need to have the ability to make tough decisions as a manager.

Advisory committees set direction of programs. Overall, the advisory committee member participants indicated that they trust the work the advisory committee accomplishes and validates the colleges' work by employing their students. The decisions that the members and the college personnel make together on the committee ensures that the program produces graduates that meet the needs of both. Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) pointed out that he perceives that the college should not try to "please everyone" and that the college only uses the "flavor of suggestions from the advisory committee." He and Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant) both perceived that the college has a varied vision of what the purpose of the advisory committee is. Mike explained shared his perceptions of the purpose as "to introduce real workforce application into the program." All four of the department chair participants collectively agreed that the advisory committee sets the direction for programs by establishing a need, determining how to go about developing a program to meet that need, set an agenda, implement, perform, evaluate, and have an expert review. Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) was more direct in her explanation of the purpose of the advisory committee than Mike and Chuck. She said:

We use the bits and pieces from all suggestions, incorporate those ideas and then come up with a plan of how to implement them for the college. Most of the committee actually wants to go in the same direction, but just doesn't realize it. We give the college an enlightened idea of how the criminal system works and what the community needs from the individuals that work with the criminals. The advisory committee is aware of what services and areas lacking employees and

we advise the college what type of jobs to train students for the future.

Tom (Community College A, advisory member participant) also shared his perceptions of the purpose of the advisory committee. He equated the impact of business and industry on the college was “huge and without the industry side [the advisory committee], obviously the college would not know the needs and points to address with their program.” Tom expressed that “business and industry keep the college informed about specifics, what is a current trend, what is up and coming in business.” He also noted that the committee provides “the college the information regarding what information the students need to learn, certifications needed, and training.” Tom further shared his perceptions that business and industry keep current on the new technologies available and new trends and that the committee helps “plug the college into the current trends and what the customer needs; otherwise, the program would be irrelevant.” Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) agreed with Tom’s views and commented that “We need industry support to tell what direction to go. It is more difficult to operate without an advisory committee.”

Advisory committee support of the college. All of the advisory committee member participants seemed proud to be included in the decision-making processes for the college. They all support their community and take ownership in the success of the colleges. Tom (Community College A, advisory member participant) stated what all advisory committee members and department chairs participants agreed with, “If people didn’t care, no one would come to the meetings and the programs would fade away. Our committee is prospering and so are others I know about.” He also said, “It is good to see the fruits of our labor come to fruition from inception to conclusion.”

Mike (Community College B, advisor member participant) is so dedicated to the college that he wants to help change the environment of the town to reflect that of a college town instead of oil and gas. He went on to share his ideas:

It is my civic duty as citizen of this community to help support the college and the students they produce. I donate money, machines, knowledge, and leadership ability to help with the machine and welding programs. I send my employees back to the college for more training. We have that kind of supportive relationship.

Mike also shared a story regarding his dedication to the college and the commitment he is aware of by the majority of the welding and machine business in town:

About 12 years ago the community members did not really like the direction the college was going in and believed it was teaching irrelevant and dated information with their welding and machine program. The college was stagnant and teaching canned programs; the programs needed to be refined, more detailed and slicker. The mayor of the town was passionate about education and wanted the business and industry community to join the advisory committee and commit to giving students internships with our companies that would lead to employment. The mayor proposed adopting students, paying for their tuition, books, and supplies. The advisory committee reached almost all the companies in town, about 30 signed-on and invested around \$3,800.00 for each student. The problem...some of the students dropped out and were not really interested in the trade. The students had no real ownership of the program because everything was given to them and it wasn't really their idea. Their families had signed up the majority of the

students and were forcing them to get trade training. It was a good learning experience and was modified to support the entire program instead of single students. Overall, it was a great idea but did not pan out and was stopped and modified after one year. Advisory members began to complain and argue because their student was not what they expected or had dropped out and they lost their investment.

Mike explained that the project was not completely dropped, just modified to support the program instead of individual students – that way the department and college who was trained in educating students had more of a hands-on view of the student and their abilities. Also, the advisory committee members were now investing specifically in the program needs and the students overall. This is the way the program is supported today by the community and has been working well for years.

Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) expressed how proud he was of the support he has from the community for his three programs. He stated that "The community will support us if we put out a good product. The product is our student." Byron does not just have the support of the local community but also of national equipment suppliers because of the rapport and respect he has developed over the years. He now has a welding training center using new equipment supplied each year with the support of a major manufacturer. The support has taken years to establish but is a combined effort by Byron and the community of welding shops supporting each other.

Summary of the affects business and industry have on workforce programs.

Research question three sought to understand how community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive the decision-making processes of

business and industry affect the decisions made for workforce education programs. The analysis of the data produced three themes: 1) internships create critical thinkers; 2) set direction of programs; and 3) support of the college.

The first theme, internships create critical thinkers, was supported by all of the participants. They agreed that the decisions made about the internship experience and the contributions made by the college and the businesses that provided the internship experiences were valuable as students are able to further develop their critical thinking skills through the experience. The second theme that emerged was that advisory committees set the direction of programs through the decisions that they make. All of the participants agreed that the directions of the programs are set by the college and advisory committee members working together to make decisions that are best for all involved. The final theme that emerged was that advisory committee members are highly supportive of the college and are advocates in the community for the college. Many of the advisory committee participants discussed how they are advocates for the college in the community and perceive that being involved in the decision-making processes for the programs enable a “win win” situation for all.

Best Practices for Collaborative Decision-making

Research question four sought to understand what recommendations community college practitioners and advisory committee members had for collaborative decision-making. The analyses of the data collected to address this research question produced three themes: 1) wide range of active community members; 2) networking opportunities; and 3) honesty and transparency.

Wide range of active community members. A major theme that emerged in the

analyses of the data was the unified perception that active individuals within the community would be beneficial to the committee. Jackie (Community College B, department chair participant) used the practice of including individuals she knew from the business side. She shared her approach to recruiting members:

I call on managers, judges, lawyers, and criminal justice administrators I worked with prior to working for the college and ask them to help me on the committee. They are familiar with the criminal justice practice and bring years of experience with them to the meetings. I usually only have individuals on the committee with at least five years of experience. It is common for them to have at least 20 years of working knowledge in the West Texas area. They are knowledgeable about the field they are in and serve on many committees in the community as the voice for their industry.

All of the advisory member participants had strong dominant, outgoing personalities and had a true interest and commitment to education. Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant) and Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) both run large successful companies and appeared to take the same leadership role as advisory committee members.

Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) also shared how he identifies and recruits advisory committee members:

It is imperative to include members on the committee that you can trust and [who] have an in-depth understanding of the needs of the program. I prefer down to earth individuals that are considered blue-collar workers and the ‘good old boys’ in town also. I have 14 different companies represented on my advisory

committee, all with years of experience as owners or managers, and most importantly – a deep understanding in the field. I can get along with anyone, so I want members that will speak openly, be the voice of their industry, and community minded. The only members I typically do not want on the committee are political personalities from the community because they are not needed and do not have enough knowledge for us to use them.

Tom (Community College A) shared that as an advisory committee member he recommended that the committee be made up of diverse members who “evenly represent different fields in the area.” He suggested going for a more “dialectic overview, not just all oil and gas or programming individuals on the committee.” Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) pointed out that an advisory committee may appear to be equally represented but sometimes a group is unintentionally left out:

Check to make sure every aspect and member is being represented on the committee. On the surface a committee may look to be well rounded and all sides represented. You need decision-makers on the committee – someone who has done actual research and studied the issues in the field. Someone should represent the field side that has documentation to back-up their suggestions.

Specifically talking about the criminal justice program, Brittany went on to say that she emphatically recommends counselors and doctors that treat prisoners should be included on the committee to balance out the legal side. She also commented that “There is too much representation from the legal side and it needs to be balanced with individuals that can speak their mind that do not work daily with the judges, lawyers, and probation officers.” In Brittany’s opinion, the committee would work more efficiently if it was

balanced and included the members she recommended.

Networking opportunities. All of the department chair participants – Alex (Community College A, department chair), Jackie (Community College B, department chair), Pam (Community College A, department chair), and Byron (Community College B, department chair) – perceived that picking up the phone and calling individuals and company owners to join the advisory committee was an effective way to recruit participants. If adjustments in programs were needed, Jackie stated that she would contact individuals in her network circle to get advice on who would be a good addition to the committee for her program. She also shared that she uses networking for her department and committee:

I have a great working relationship with individuals and businesses in town because I worked with them for years prior to coming to the college. I even hired many to be in my department because we have a close, honest, transparent, working relationship and work well as a cohesive group. I have advisory members that have a level head in business. I am not shy about picking up the phone and calling the advisory member prior to the meeting to get their opinion and ask for support at the meeting.

Many of the advisory member participants perceived that networking was an essential component of the advisory meetings. Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) expressed that most individuals liked going to the meetings and used them as an opportunity to connect with other business and industry leaders to gain insight regarding changes in the industry. Mike also acknowledged that it is a two way reciprocal relationship:

The majority of the members really like getting together and coming to the meetings because of the shared interest. The advisory committee meeting is the only time we get to sit down and visit with each other. We truly have a respect for one another. Getting to meet each other face to face and look one another in the eye is the best way to connect in business.

Pam (Community College A, department chair participant) recommended establishing an advisory platform to communicate and network throughout the year regarding the successes and new implementations of the program. This would enable her to keep the advisory members up to date with successes and failures. Pam also pointed out that her advisory committee members come to the meetings because they perceive “they are providing a community service by serving on the advisory committee.”

Honesty and transparency. An area that all eight of the participants agreed upon was the need for everyone on the advisory committee to be honest, upfront, and transparent. These standard procedures are used in negotiations, meetings, phone conversations, and any discussions involving the college agenda. Jackie (Community College B, department chair participant) commented on the importance of transparency:

Open communication helps the advisory committee to air out any issues and speak freely. I even believe that a heated discussion helps and leads to solving problems faster. The heated exchanges show passion and lets other advisory members know how important an issue is for a particular industry. When someone participates in a heated conversation, the facts become apparent and the underlying issues are revealed. Sometimes we just agree to disagree and a plan will not work but we still remain respectful of each party.

Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) discussed the importance of transparency with business and industry and the mission of community colleges:

A college has to be true to who they are and what they do. Don't change just to fit the economy. I develop the best practices in automotive and then stick with it.

The college provides good trusting services and the community and business and industry will keep coming back to us for employees and support.

Relative to transparency, Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) suggested that the college share with the advisory committee how many students succeeded and failed in association with the committee's recommendation and implementation of program changes or modifications. She preferred to have a transparent relationship with the college and the advisory members at the meetings, including honest discussions regarding the outcomes of the implementation of suggestions. She went on to say that we need to know answers to the following questions: "Did the students complete the program or just dropped out and go to work? Were the companies flexible working with the students so they could finish their programs?"

Summary of best practices for decision-making. Research question four sought to understand what recommendations community college practitioners and advisory committee members had for collaborative decision-making. The analyses of the data collected to address this research question produced three themes: 1) wide range of active community members; 2) networking opportunities; and 3) honesty and transparency.

The first theme addressed how all of the participants perceived that advisory committees need to be inclusive and representation on the committee should be diverse and include a wide array of community members. The second theme that emerged was the importance of networking and that many opportunities for networking presented themselves at advisory committee meetings. Visiting and discussing at the meetings give members an opportunity to gain insight into progress and changes within the industry. The advisory committee meetings are a common way to network and reach out within the business and industry realm. The final theme that emerged and was presented was the concepts of honesty and transparency among committee members. The members prefer complete transparency in order to make legitimate decisions for the program.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the findings of this study. Research question one sought to understand what community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are effective practices and strategies in the decision making process related to workforce programs. The analyses of the data produced three themes specific to the best practices utilized in the decision-making process by the advisory committees. 1) voice of business and industry; 2) equal representation and balance; and 3) decision-making process.

Research question two sought to understand what community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceived were the challenges to working collaboratively. The analyses of the data produced three themes: 1) lack of knowledge regarding educational system; 2) hiring employees and completers; and 3) workforce respect and trust.

Research question three sought to understand how community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceived the decision-making processes of business and industry impacted the decisions made for workforce education programs. The analysis of the data produced three themes: 1) internships create critical thinkers; 2) sets direction; and 3) support.

Research question four sought to understand what recommendations community college practitioners and advisory committee members had for collaborative decision-making. The analyses of the data produced three themes: 1) wide range of active community members, 2) networking opportunities, and 3) honesty and transparency.

Chapter V will present a discussion of the findings of this study. Also provided will be the implications and recommendations for higher education practice based on the results of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Chapter V presents an overview of the study and discussion of the study's findings. Implications and recommendations for higher education practice are discussed, followed by suggestions for future research.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific foci were the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process. Community college advisory committees provide expert advice for the development and continuity of workforce education programs, and provide insight into relevant knowledge and skills needed in the workforce (Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education [GIPWE], 2015; Minnesota State Colleges and Universities [MNSCU], 2013).

The role of the advisory committee for community college workforce programs is changing and becoming increasingly necessary due to legislative imperatives and current changes in the workforce (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2011; Soares, 2010). Business, industry, and higher education institutions are adapting programs to fit thriving regional economies and are calling upon advisory committees to make major program decisions to help ensure an educated workforce (Carlson et al., 2011). No real guidelines exist to aid community college administrators with the decision-making processes that are needed to

address the complexities caused by demands for accountability and justification to stakeholders for program decisions (Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Holzer, 2008). The findings of this study can be used to advance the practice of higher education relative to the decision-making processes utilized by community colleges workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions about workforce programs.

The conceptual framework that guided this study was based on the concept that decision-making is a process, whether in business or education, and there are those individuals that possess skills in making accurate decisions (Jones, 2006; Spector, 2012). According to Day (2001) and Kilcrease (2011), the strength of community college workforce education program advisory committees is the wealth of knowledge they bring to workforce education curriculum, and their contributions to workforce education programs through collaborative decision-making processes. The nature of decision-making and the benefits to using group decision-making processes can maximize the available expertise within an advisory committee (Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011). The decisions a college and business make are complex and the perspectives of multiple members are necessary to assess accurately the need and probable success of a workforce education program (Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999).

This qualitative study was conducted through the lens of naturalistic inquiry using a collective case study research design to address the following four research questions:

1. What do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are effective practices and strategies in the decision making process related to workforce programs?

2. What do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are the challenges to working collaboratively?
3. How do community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive the decision-making processes of business and industry impact the decisions made for workforce education programs?
4. What recommendations do community college practitioners and advisory committee members have for collaborative decision-making?

The settings for this study were two public, rural-serving community colleges located in the South Plains region of West Texas. There were a total of eight participants in this study. The participants included four workforce department chairs, two each from Community College A and B. In addition, two advisory committee members from Community College A and two from Community College B were also participants. At the time of the study, the four department chairs had been employed within the community college for at least two years. The inclusion criterion for advisory committee members was that they currently serve on or have served on an advisory committee at one of the study institutions within the past two years at the time of the study. This length of service in the system ensured they possessed a strong background and familiarity with workforce advisory committees.

Community College A is a public, rural-serving institution (Carnegie Classification of Institution of Higher Education, n.d.), with a student population of 6,227. The two participants from Community College A included a department chair overseeing the automotive and diesel technicians programs and a department chair overseeing the information technology program. The two participating advisory

committee members from Community College A included a local manager for a major global supplier who serves on the automotive and diesel technician advisory committee. The other has managerial experience working in the surrounding communities in information technology and serves on the information technology advisory committee.

Community College B is a public, rural-serving institution with a student population of 5,132 students (Carnegie Classification of Institution of Higher Education, n.d.). The two participants from Community College B included the department chair overseeing the criminal justice program and the department chair for the welding, machine, and survey programs. The two participant advisory committee members from Community College B included a criminal justice advisory committee member and an advisory committee member for the welding, machine, and survey programs.

Discussion of the Findings

Effective Practices and Strategies in Decision-Making

Research question one sought to understand what community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceive are effective practices and strategies in the decision-making process related to workforce programs. The analyses of the data produced three themes specific to the best practices utilized in the decision-making process by the advisory committees: 1) voice of business and industry; 2) every facet should be represented and balanced as to their specific needs; and 3) decision-making process.

Voice of business and industry. All department chair and advisory member participants agreed that workforce advisory committees have the ability to influence and represent the needs and wants of the community. To achieve results-driven progress as a

committee, a deep-rooted respect and trust must be established within the membership. The experience, expertise, and knowledge gained by the advisory committee members through personal experiences and trial and error results in the recommendations they provide to the committee. Throughout the review of the literature for this study, it was noted that advisory committees provide expertise and experience, and influence the direction of workforce programs as the members provide insight into relevant knowledge and skills needed in the workforce (e.g., GIPWE, 2015; Lane Community College [LCC], 2013). Advisory committee members are expected to offer professional advice and programmatic recommendations based on the needs of the local community and their professional experience (Collin Community College, 2011; LCC, 2013).

The advisory committee members are directly involved with business and industry in the community and, therefore, are able to share current trends and needs with the committee to advise a directive for the community college workforce program. Alex, department chair participant from Community College A, discussed the importance of all members of the community that may be affected by the decisions made at advisory committee meetings to have a voice. In order to ensure that all that are affected have a voice, he shared that he invites everyone from the community within the industry, to the advisory committee meetings. This finding supports the work of Baber (2011), Bray (2011), and Kress (2012), who support that colleges and business and industry must work collaboratively in order to ensure offered programs meet the needs of the workforce.

According to Soares (2010), the key to community colleges working collaboratively with business and industry is to include the right individuals on the advisory committee; those who are dedicated to not only their business, but the college as

well. This point was discussed by all of the department chair participants who noted that finding the right individuals for the committee requires being an active member in the community and knowing who would be best to appoint to the committee for the program. Businesses and industry are abundant in many communities, but not all have successful decision-makers and even fewer are willing to invest time with another organization, which is a point that was discussed in the literature (e.g., Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011).

As addressed by the department chair participants in this study, at times it is a challenge for them to find leaders in local companies who are willing to give back to their community by way of collaborating with their local community colleges, which was also an issue noted in the literature reviewed for this study (e.g., Carlson et al., 2011; Hamilton, 2004). Influential advisory committee members have the ability to generate support for the local community college workforce programs and also offer relevant advice (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010). Having a strong department chair who is willing to pick up the phone, knock on doors, and use networking to find business and industry is also key to a successful workforce education program.

All of the department chair participants discussed the importance of finding a true leader within the community to head-up the advisory committee – one who is committed to the community and his or her business. The leader must want to represent the voice of the industry and be able to see the bigger picture, especially with any challenges the community is experiencing such as an economic downturn to booming oil and gas industry demands. As discussed in the literature, the advisory committee leader's role is to influence others to work towards a common goal and not take on the project as his or her sole responsibility (e.g., Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2011; Northouse, 2013). These

individuals work closely with the department chair of a program, creating a reciprocal relationship. As noted by Northouse (2013), it is important for leaders to put aside their own self-interest for the good of others or in this case, the workforce program at the college. This need was supported by the findings of this study as the department chair participants voiced the need for their advisory committees to be open to the needs of all in the community and not just those with representation on the committee. The purpose of the advisory committee is to serve and represent the needs of the local community and it takes a strong leader from the local community to help lead the committee in this direction. As noted by Alex (department chair participant, Community College A), “the advisory members act as the voice of the industry and help set the skills needed for the program.” This was further stressed by Chuck, advisory committee participant from Community College A, who addressed why the advisory committee members need to be the voice for the community and not a specific business. He said, “We are not the only business in town but as the advisory committee, we advise the college so all the students will be employable somewhere, even if they don’t fit my [company name] particular standards.”

Equal representation and balance. All eight of the participants agreed that participation and speaking-up in the advisory meeting was crucial to the overall success of the work of the advisory committee and program. Both Pam and Alex (Community College A, department chair participants) noted how important it is for all members on the advisory committee to get to talk and “share ideas,” and they both noted that at times this requires a strong vocal leader for the committee. In addition to all having a voice, the advisory member participants shared their perceptions that it was also important that

the committee was made up of diverse representation – not only in ethnicities – but also diversity relative to business size. This finding was supported in the prior literature by Kilcrease (2011) and Kerka (2002) who also identified the need to include a diverse group of business and industry personnel on the committee to represent large and small companies. In addition, the advisory committee participants noted the importance of having open and honest discussions without time limits, to allow anyone interested to give their input.

Advisory committee members have a direct connection to the economic changes within a community and have an understanding of what is relevant in business and industry within the community, as well as the industry in general. The collaborations formed with these entities represent a reciprocal relationship. Community colleges need knowledgeable, relevant, and attentive advisory members on their workforce committees, driven by the need for business and industry to work with these institutions to produce a skilled and relevant workforce, contributing to a decreased unemployment rate (Bray, 2011; Price & Roberts, 2009). The advisory member participants in this study emphasized that business and industry do not have the time to train or retrain employees on their own, creating a need for the local community college to provide specialized training to help address local workforce needs.

As Day (2001) and Kilcrease (2011) identify, the strength of advisory committees is the wealth of knowledge they bring to workforce programs. The wealth of knowledge comes from the community as a whole. For example, a welding presence in a community is not just the corporations that have multi-complex buildings and hire 100 welders or more. The small shops that hire two or 10 employees, but manage to keep them for the

duration of their career, are a powerful resource to a community and their representation is needed on the advisory committee. The findings in this study support the findings noted in the literature that in order to have a well-balanced committee, multiple perspectives are needed to make the decisions and assess the needs of a successful workforce program (e.g., Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999; Kilcrease, 2011). Meeting the needs of the community by offering training for critical skills needed for employment (Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Holzer, 2008) requires meeting the needs of all of the community, not just a select large group.

Having key business and industry leaders on the advisory committee who have proven track records of working collaboratively with others in the community is an asset to encourage representation from others within the community. As shared by Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant), a member with years of experience and maturity, regardless of size, is who should be on the advisory committee. As noted by Daugherty (2015) and DiMattina (2014), to create a local, united community supporting the workforce education programs, all business and industry operations, whether large corporations or small independents, must be included and provide an avenue to share their voice.

Decision-making process. A finding in this study was that the participants perceived that workforce programs should be built around values, professionalism, ethics, and core values; and that the advisory committee members should use these values and expectations to make decisions for the program. Many of the participants discussed how the advisory committee was a representation of them as businesses and industry in the community, and the decisions they make reflect on their personal businesses. All of the

advisory member participants discussed how proud they were to be on the advisory committee for the college program and put as much into the decision-making at these meetings as they do at their own business. As shared by Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant), “the decisions we make are not just building for tomorrow but we are building for the next generation by managing for the good times to take care of the down times.”

All of the participants agreed decision-making was one of the most difficult tasks of their roles on the committee. This was showcased by Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) who stated that “Being on the advisory committee, you have to know what to ask, how to ask it, and assess what the actual needs are in a community – this is decision-making.” Even though all the advisory members agreed decision-making for another entity was difficult, they all possessed the confidence to make the decisions for the college because of their years of experience and proven track records. Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) explained that “Decision-making is something that comes with experience and time.” He went on to say, “We don’t want all yes people on our committees – they keep us focused and accountable for the decisions made in committee and the impact of those decisions.”

Workforce programs require a decisive and productive decision-making process, which is key to successful practices and strategies. Including individuals on the committee that are confident, skilled, experienced in making-decisions, weigh their options, voice opinions, and genuinely care about the program is optimal for program success. Daugherty (2015) and DiMattina (2014) claim that individuals that not only care about the product they are producing, the college involvement, and future employees, but

have connections to the community they serve are skilled at communicating with business and industry as well as the college to work collaboratively, are key to establishing successful practices and strategies for workforce education programs.

The findings of this study revealed that advisory committees are made-up of a group of diverse business and industry decision-makers who use their experiences to help with the decision-making process of the committee. Because the decisions an advisory committee makes are complex, adding multiple perspectives will allow the committee to assess the probable success of a workforce education program by experts in the field of study (Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999). The department chair participants shared noted that business and industry advisory committee members are aware of current trends, modern changes, and advancements in workforce programs and are willing to share their knowledge with members of the advisory committee. These findings are supported through the research of Kilcrease (2011), who confirms that the leaders of business and industry working collaboratively with college leaders using honed decision-making skills are beneficial when facing unexpected challenges. The consistent change in business and industry demands makes the decision-making process for workforce programs complicated (Day, 2001; Kilcrease, 2011).

At the root of a successful collaboration is the advisory committee's ability to make decisions by involving knowledgeable members (Carlson et al., 2011; Kilcrease, 2011). The state of Texas also recognizes the benefits of having business and industry on the committee because the GIPWE manual that provides the guidelines for workforce advisory committees for educational programs, requires the advisory committee for community colleges to be industry based. The members of the committees should

generally consist of industry leaders (Davis & Davis, 2009), and strong decision-makers such as business owners, managers, economic development manager, lawyers, bankers, financial advisors, and community leaders (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010). The findings of this study are similar to the research of Carlson et al. (2011) and Kilcrease (2010) who also identified that the successful collaboration of knowledgeable committee members who have the ability to make decisions is important components of the workforce education program. The decisions a college and business and industry make are complex; the involvement of multiple perspectives are necessary to access the probable outcomes of a program (Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999). Operations of organizations differ from one to the other in makeup and size, but rely on the decision-making of many knowledgeable individuals (Spector, 2012). Business and industry and colleges are all driven by a budget and have to justify to stakeholders the decisions they make. The alliance of advisory members all working towards a common goal, with the trust and respect of the community (Burke & Miller, 1999; Johnson, 2012), are better positioned to be leaders and to justify to stakeholder their decision-making process (Carlson et al., 2011).

The workforce advisory committee must include proven decision-makers from business and industry that have the ability to combine company decisions with the college's vision. The college is committed to its vision and mission, and employees support that vision (Sena, Sena, & Crable, 2010). The advisory committee's function is to make decisions in the best interest of the college. As defined by Mintzberg (1979), decision-making is defined as "the process of developing a commitment to a course of action" (p. 58). This definition supports the processes utilized by advisory committees in

making the best decisions for workforce programs.

Challenges to Working Collaboratively

Research question two sought to understand what community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceived were the challenges to working collaboratively. The analysis of the data produced three themes: 1) lack of knowledge regarding educational system; 2) hiring employees and completers; and 3) workforce respect and trust.

Lack of knowledge regarding educational system. A major theme that emerged through the findings of this study regarded the challenges community colleges face when trying to work collaboratively with business and industry. This challenge was expressed in the context of community colleges differ from business and industry as they do not just specialize and focus on one particular education area; business and industry specialize traditionally in one product and that is the area of their expertise. This creates a challenge for community colleges because they need a diverse set of experts in order to have a voice representing the area the program embodies. This challenge can be addressed, though, through the advisory committee being the liaison and link between the college's workforce education program and the community (Davis & Davis, 2009; Kerka, 2002; Kilcrease, 2011). The operations of a community college may differ from business and industry, but the decision-making talents of many individuals (Jones, 2006; Spector, 2012) on the advisory committee results in an effective workforce education program. Mike and Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participants) addressed a lack of understanding of the community college rules, which they claimed inhibits the committee from helping the college excel to its fullest potential by using the rules to the

advisory committee's advantage. Alex and Pam (Community College A, department chair participants) shared that normally the advisory committee just accepts what the college tells them regarding the rules. The participants did not, however, that as members get tenure on the committee, their knowledge increases about the rules and regulations that govern community colleges. This increase in understanding provides a knowledge base that the committee can use to function more productively within those guidelines. Findings by Meeder and Pawlowski (2012) support the perceptions of the participants in this study that business and industry are familiar with working within government regulations and finding ways to excel, so this knowledge and understanding within the educational environment is also important and the advisory committee can greatly benefit from this knowledge.

Hiring employees and completers. A finding related to research question two was that the department chair participants noted that students at times want to accept employment before finishing their studies; however, this discussed how this was not the best course of action for the student, college, or employer. A student leaving the workforce program prior to completion risks not attaining a credential, as well as misses out on future courses that can enhance their knowledge and skills. Research conducted by Burke and Miller (1999) supports that individuals who are willing to make concessions and negotiate are best served in the area of workforce education programs. This statement would be true for business and industry as well as the student. The community college has streamlined current certificate programs to achieve stronger economic payoffs (Kazis, 2011). As the connection between business and industry and the college, the advisory committee can help both address the issue of students leaving

the college prior to the completion of attaining a credential in order to go to work (Davis & Davis, 2009; Kilcrease, 2011). The advisory committee can work as a facilitator of internships for the student and also can help students locate gainful employment (Benigni, Ferguson, & McGee, 2011; Davis & Davis, 2009). The department chair participants acknowledged that business and industry in their local communities are working with the college and the students to assist with tuition, modifying hours, and providing internships in an effort to help ensure students to complete their studies before obtaining full-time employment.

Workforce respect and trust. The participants in this study, and as noted previously, perceive that workforce education programs should be built around values, professionalism, ethics, and core values to remain sustainable. Part of the collaboration between the college and business and industry is that that all parties are involved in the entire process. The findings of this study indicated that the department chair participants value the needs of all stakeholders in advisory committee meetings and trust that the committee will listen and present their needs. All of the participants commented that it does not do the community a service when the collaboration is only for name recognition and not to truly work collaboratively together to provide a united program for the community. According to Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant) and Alex (Community College A, department chair participant), this is an important step to prove to the community that everyone should respect and trust what the advisory committee is trying to do for the program it serves and will not be fully productive without all stakeholders involved. They both expressed this is difficult, but a necessary component to show to the community the value they hold for each member, the

community, and the program. In the review of the literature for this study, it was found that the findings in this area were similar to the work of Kilcrease (2011) who states that an advisory committee has more success when various specialties and occupations of expertise are represented. As also identified in the GIPWE (2010), to be successful, advisory committees generally consist of influential individuals that generate public support for the workforce programs. The trust in the advisory committee has to be established at the beginning and then the respect will follow once the members realize they are working with professionals for the good of all and not just special interest.

The final finding relative to research question two was specific to respect and trust for workforce education programs in general. Advisory member participants, Chuck (Community College A) and Mike (Community College B) both expressed the sentiment that workforce education does not receive the notoriety when compared to other academic disciplines. The advisory committee participants expressed that the product being produced through workforce education programs is vital to the economy and stability of a global workforce, yet the programs do not receive attention for their latest advancements and securing jobs for employees in the workforce. As addressed by some of the participants, workforce education programs are considered part of the middle class labor pool and for students who cannot make it in elite four-year colleges and universities. The advisory committee participants also shared that workforce program leaders typically are not found to be giving speeches at large functions and promoting the latest development, therefore, the stigma that has been attached since the old vocational technical days is still attached to the programs and workforce education does not receive the respect it deserves. The literature fully supports that workforce education training has

a direct connection to improving the economy (e.g., Bray, 2011). Other scholars, including Bray (2011), recognize that workforce education programs provide retraining to unemployed workers, resulting in a decreased unemployment rate and a boost to the economy (e.g., Hodges, 2012; Kazis, 2011). As research shows, business and industry working together with community colleges produce a skilled workforce, contributing to a decreased unemployment rate (e.g., Bray, 2011; Price & Roberts, 2009). Since workforce education is relevant to an employable society, community colleges must publically acknowledge and express their gratitude for the collaboration with business and industry regarding their contributions to the progress of the community in order to help address the stigma surrounding employment in mid-level workforce positions.

A final finding related to this research question was about donations to workforce education programs and how at times the funds are not always allocated to the desired program. As Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant) pointed out, when funds are given, the donor does not want to worry that they are not going towards the need intended. An example of this was provided by Byron (Community College B, department chair participant) who explained that his relationship of trust and respect developed with the community because of the years he spent working in his own shop with the same group of individuals. The literature supports that members who have an influence within the local community are instrumental in seeking support for programs (e.g., Johnson, 2013). Byron stated that he is always upfront with individuals and makes sure the advisory committee members and department know how the funds were being spent and why. The findings of this study, as revealed through the perceptions of the participants, are that the trust and respect relationships that the workforce department

chair has with the advisory committee leader is vital for lobbying for money and equipment from within the community.

Effects of Business and Industry on Workforce Programs

Research question three sought to understand how community college practitioners and advisory committee members perceived the decision-making processes of business and industry affect the decisions made for workforce education programs. The analysis of the data produced three themes: 1) internships create critical thinkers; 2) advisory committees set direction of programs; and 3) support of the college.

Internships create critical thinkers. All of the participants perceive that business and industry internships and the close connection to the college prepare the students for success. They all agreed that the internship experience helps match students with their training needs and is imperative to creating critical thinking skills in students alongside the hands-on training that the internship provides. Chuck specifically addressed this in the context that students connect their formal classroom training with real life experiences and become lifelong critical thinkers during their internship experiences. The literature reviewed for this study supports aligning job training with current economic workforce needs to develop a highly qualified labor supply and a long-term supply of workers contributing to a strong sustainable economy (e.g., Baber, 2011; Hodges, 2012; Kazis, 2011). Working directly with business and industry during the internship helps students know what to ask, how to ask it, and probe for more answers. Students working hands-on, side-by-side through internships with business and industry creates performance driven students. The student then has a toolbox of knowledge to ask relevant questions, seek answers, and produce quality products, with attention to detail by

being a critical thinker in the workforce.

Research conducted by Kazis (2011) supports producing graduates quicker through the restructuring of programs and the internship to help create critical thinkers of the students with hands-on training provided by potential employers. The findings of this study support the work of Kazis, as the participants also perceived that internships are created through advisory committee member's connections and their own companies, and play an important role in the critical thinking skills of students. The advisory committees help develop programs from start to finish and placing students in internships creates a network connection with business and industry as well as an opportunity for placement after completion. These findings align with the works of Johnson (2013) and Meeder and Pawlowski (2012) who found advisory committee members who have influence within the local community are influential in securing placement of students after completion (Johnson, 2013). Using the community college's flexibility to quickly develop training programs, especially in areas that lack skilled workers (Bray, 2011; Hodges, 2012), these internships provide opportunities for graduates' future possible employment. DiMattina (2014) confirms that community colleges have the ability to react to changes in industry quickly, and can offer degrees and certificates in specifically focused areas. According to Bray (2011), to meet the changing needs of a community, community colleges provide shortened workforce education programs including internships sponsored by the advisory committee members as well as other community members. Employers are looking for employees that have the ability to think critically and find solutions using their workforce education training and internships without needing years of experience on the job and constant supervision.

Advisory committees set direction of programs. Business and industry and community colleges share a vision to look towards the future regarding the services they provide. Since business and industry are opportunity-driven and focus on providing solutions, they are focused on the next opportunity or evolving challenge. All of the participants in this study discussed that both entities face many challenges. As addressed by the participants, the guidance and leadership provided by business and industry allows community college to take advantage of the risk takers as they try out new ideas and address changes and challenges, then passing on what they have learned to the colleges. The decisions the advisory committee makes are complex and the expertise of multiple members to help assess the probability of success of a workforce education program (Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999; Day, 2001) are needed to set the direction the program will go in the future. Day (2001) points out that if the general make-up of the advisory committee represents various specialties and occupations of expertise, the direction of the program will be successful. Similar to Day, but in a different context, the advisory committee member participants in this study noted that the challenges were especially poignant in the South Plains region of West Texas where the study institutions are located, as the area has recently experienced a surge in oil and gas production, changing the immediate needs of the community. Through this challenge, business and industry has worked to gather the information to address challenges and then passed it along to the advisory committees to set the direction. As a result, the direction and needs of the strong oil and gas community began to be addressed by business and industry working with the community college to train employees for immediate needs. This collaboration became evident in the equipment and funds shared with the colleges as well

as the expertise shared with the programs.

The community college is known for running efficient and streamlined programs that fit the needs of an emergent community. DiMattina (2014) has previously identified similar findings as was found in this study. DiMattina found that business and industry working together with community colleges under the guidance of the department chair through the workforce advisory committee, create job training in communities that can successfully train, demonstrate, negotiate, deliver, adjust, plan, and merge talents.

Research conducted by Carlson et al. (2011) revealed that leaders who are familiar with the community and have already established a relationship with stakeholders are better prepared to guide the advisory committee members to make decisions regarding the best direction for the workforce program, which is needed during times of economic stress due to workforce skills need. This has resulted in a trained workforce to accommodate the changing needs of the South Plains region of West Texas; wherein business and industry alone lacked the ability to train employees to adapt to a rapidly changing economy (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC] & National Center on Education and the Economy [NCEE], 2009; Kazis, 2011).

The findings in this study found that collaborations are imperative and is supported by the ACT (2012) who projects that training in workforce career areas will account for 23% of all job openings between 2008-2018. Working with business and industry through the advisory committee will identify and target future employment opportunities. The projections on the labor demand are such that community college workforce programs are more than a convenient alternative (ACT, 2012); they are the binding staple in the realm of higher education's connection to economic solidity.

The findings of this study continue to support that the advisory committee helps set the direction workforce programs will go in the future as community colleges are tied to their mission statement and they have the final say regarding any program changes as regulated by state oversight boards. Because workforce programs increase and deepen the relationships between the college and the community while also creating a vested interest in the local citizenry (Carlson, 2011), collaborations between the college and business and industry are vital but must occur without the college losing its identity. As mentioned previously in this study, community colleges find themselves in a precarious situation as a result of continual budget constraints (Bray, 2011). The research produced by Jacobs (2014) confirms that workforce education programs are more expensive to start-up and maintain. As the findings in this study indicated, the department chair participants agreed that their role as administrators often revolves around making decisions regarding program development. The research literature supports that community colleges are offsetting the expenses associated with workforce education programs by collaborating with local businesses and industries, and following through with their suggestions by using effective department chairs as liaisons (e.g., Carlson et al., 2011; Greenstone & Looney, 2011). The role of the department chair is more important than ever to secure and maintain a collaborative environment that reflects the mission of the community college.

Advisory committee support of the college. The findings of this study indicate that successful advisory committees all possess a convincing, direct, take-charge personality that carries over to the advisory committee meetings. Some of the advisory committee participants, Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant),

Chuck (Community College A, advisory member participant), and Tom (Community College A, advisory member participant), all had a strong connection and network with the community and perceive it is important to give back, which equates to soliciting donating, providing instructors, and equipment for the college. The connection to community through the college was evident in their discussions as they described sharing their skills, donation of time, and pride in their affiliation with the college. Finding business and industry individuals that possess these qualities is vital to a successful advisory committee. Research conducted by DiMattina (2014) and Meeder and Pawlowski (2012) confirm that the support of these businesses and industries serve to promote effective community engagement, generate community interest, develop courses, recommend development of courses, identify business needs, secure corporate participation, and offer professional guidance to the college. Not only is individual support needed, but financial as well (Texas Workforce Commission, 2013). This point is supported by the National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES], 2010) and Soares (2010), as they suggest business and industry leaders are willing to partner with community colleges and acknowledge their share of training expenses as colleges are growing rapidly and their budgets are continuing to decrease.

Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014) also suggest opening channels of communication to merge public and private funds so that an equitable share is borne by each -- business and industry and the community college. As noted by Carlson et al. (2011), the initial start-up costs for a program is costly without partnering with business and industry. All of the department chair participants in this study agreed that individuals who can explain to community leaders how working collaboratively supporting the

workforce program in turn supports their success as well, is crucial to forming effective advisory committees.

The sentiments stated by all of the department chair participants in regards to the significance of state budget cuts to workforce education programs are confirmed in the findings of the studies conducted by Oliff, Palacios, Johnson, and Leachman (2013), who found that budget restrictions have consequences for colleges and their students. The continued budget cuts in higher education require colleges to cut faculty and programs, raise tuition which further burdens students with increased debts, and diminishes the quality of education (Oliff et al., 2013). The need for collaborations between community college workforce programs and business and industry is vital in order to keep workforce programs funded, equipment and internships available, and to supply community support -- the advisory committee is central to the success (Meeder & Pawlowski, 2012).

The community college budget may seem like an anomaly to business and industry that work on produced income, profit projections, and revenue income. Since the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) is demanding more accountability and curriculum changes within the state of Texas (Oliff et al., 2013), the decision-making and support of business and industry justifying changes and expenditures to stakeholders is more important than ever. Decision-making is a process and will take time and groundwork by the community college, and especially the workforce department chair. Community College department chairs deal with budget restrictions and understand the importance of community connections to assist with program funding. Alex and Pam, both department chairs at Community College A, expressed the realization that their department's financial success relies heavily on

connections they make in the community to secure equipment and funds for their programs. All of the department chair participants exhibited strong and confident personalities and had no reservations calling on business and industry as well as networking to make connections with local community individuals for support which are traits noted by DiMattina (2014) as important.

The findings of this study also identified that workforce department chairs that achieve a strong bond with an influential business and industry leader within the community are able to secure support, financing, equipment, and a connection to current product knowledge for their workforce education program. The research of Meeder and Pawlowski (2012) support that the trust and supportive relationship between the workforce department chair and business and industry leaders will impact the success of the workforce education program and relationships with the community. As decision-making is a continual process, a continual emergent balance between the workforce dean, department chair, and business and industry leaders, including flexibility and willingness to negotiate, is imperative to a successful and productive collaboration as the direction is set, taking full advantage of the positive impact the relationship will yield over time.

Best Practices for Collaborative Decision-making

Research question four sought to understand what recommendations community college practitioners and advisory committee members had for collaborative decision-making. The analyses of the data produced three themes: 1) wide range of active community members; 2) networking opportunities; and 3) honesty and transparency.

Wide range of active community members. A finding related to the analysis of data for research question four was that collaborative decision-making should involve a

wide range of community members. All of the department chair participants identified that strong individuals from within the college and business and industry were needed to solicit members of the community to give of their time, funds, and equipment to the program. Meeder and Pawlowski (2012) support having strong, vocal, and confident leadership on the advisory committee, which they perceive results in ownership of the workforce program -- equating to success. Other research supports including individuals who have the ability and commitment to make decisions and who are committed to a course of action (e.g., Mintzberg 1979). Brittany (Community College B, advisory member participant) shared that business and industry use tenacity, confidence, and perseverance to address challenges and employ a “never say never” attitude. This leadership style has transformed the advisory committee into a powerful asset being led by consultants and executives sharing their experiences with workforce programs at the community colleges. Previous literature supports including enthusiastic and committed members on the committee for the overall success of the workforce education program (e.g., Johnson, 2013). Further, to create unity between the members, a strong leader will assist members of a committee to see the benefits associated with making concessions and negotiating to best serve the needs of the workforce education program (Burke & Miller, 1999; Johnson, 2013; Northouse, 2013).

The findings of this study support prior research that a specific criterion for advisory committee members depends heavily on the department chair’s temperament and especially the disposition of the department chair. The prior relationship the department chair has had with business and industry individuals within the local community prior to entering the community college workforce program becomes an

extension of the advisory committee (Sena et al., 2010). This was evidenced by Jackie (Community College B, department chair participant) who stated that she includes individuals on the committee who she knew from business, including professionals she worked with prior to working for the college. DiMattina (2014) stresses that it is important for advisory committee members to be knowledgeable of the field they are in and serve on many committees in the community as the voice for their industry.

Allingham (2002) and Burke and Miller (2011) found that the decisions that colleges and business and industry make are complex and the perspectives and expertise of multiple members are necessary. Mike (Community College B, advisory member participant), stated that he finds it imperative to include members on the advisory committee who can be trusted and who have an in-depth understanding of the needs of the program. He also addressed that he prefers "...down to earth individuals that are considered blue-collar workers and the 'good old boys' in town with a deep understanding in the field that will speak openly, be the voice of their industry, and community minded." The review of the literature for this study suggests that a progressive advisory committee should consist of individuals with varying leadership experiences and management styles (e.g., Dixon, 1990), with transparency in the decision-making process a critical element to the success of the committee (e.g., Bess & Dee, 2008) as well as is commitment to the process.

Networking opportunities. Networking is an essential component of advisory committees and their meetings. A finding in this study that was shared by all of the study's participants was that most of the individuals on the committee use the meetings as an opportunity to connect with other business and industry leaders to gain insight regarding changes in the industry. Prior research supports that this finding is a benefit to

advisory committees as it helps them create programs, obtain resources, and develop public awareness of the training programs (e.g., GIPWE, 2015; THECB, 2013). The research of Day (2001) and Kilcrease (2011) is similar to the perceptions of some of the participants in this study (specifically Pam and Mike) who perceive that having professionals from within the community on the committee help guide workforce programs through needed support.

The literature presented in this study supports the advantages of networking to advisory committees. Carlson et al. (2011) explain that business and industry leaders realize that combining efforts to train workers results in an effective economic gain through the sharing of materials, supplies, equipment, and services. Networking opportunities help business and industry align job training with current economic workforce needs in order to generate a highly qualified labor supply, specifically in middle skill jobs; contribute to a long-term supply of workers; and a strong sustainable economy (Baber, 2011; Hodges, 2012; Kazis, 2011). For community colleges to accomplish these goals regional needs must be aligned with workforce needs and the workforce education program is designed to provide this needed training (Hodges, 2012; Perna, 2012).

When President Barack Obama announced in 2009 the American Graduation Initiative (AGI) challenge to community colleges to educate an additional five million students with credentials, certificates, and degrees by 2020, networking between the community college and business and industry became more important than ever to accomplish this goal. Because businesses and industry working with community colleges is part of an effort to put American's back to work in needed skilled areas to help the

economy (Carlson et al., 2011; Soares, 2010), it is more important than ever that they capitalize on prior networking connections with other community members. Individual businesses and community colleges do not have the funds or skills necessary to train, conduct research, and market all of their needs, especially when competing globally (ACT, 2012; Carlson et al., 2011), but networking with other stakeholders through the workforce advisory committee meetings helps to provide a platform to discuss and find solutions to achieve their goals.

Honesty and transparency. A majority of the participants addressed the need to be honest and transparent in advisory committee meetings and with advisory committee members. Alex (Community College A, department chair participant) noted that he is completely transparent with his advisory committee. Jackie (Community College B, department chair participant) perceived that it is of the utmost importance to the successful function of the advisory committee to be transparent in order to help the advisory committee air out any issues and speak freely. Typically, this technique is used in business and industry meetings but it is not often found in community college meetings, wherein the meetings tend to be more structured. DiMattina (2014) addresses that a heated discussion can lead to solving problems faster and lets other advisory members know how important an issue is for a particular industry. Honesty and transparency among committee members reveal the underlying issues within the committee. The honest and transparent perspectives of multiple members are necessary to assess accurately the need and probable success of a workforce education program (Allingham, 2002; Burke & Miller, 1999). Advisory committees generally consist of a variety of individuals with varying leadership management styles (Dixon, 1990);

transparent decision-making is critical for group success (Bess & Dee, 2008).

Implications for Higher Education Practice

The findings of this study suggest several implications for higher education practice. The decision-making process for community college workforce education programs requires a process that involves collaborating with key individuals in local business and industry. Key individuals with business and educational leaders combine their expertise to make accurate decisions to produce a quality workforce education program (Meeder & Pawlowski, 2012; Spector, 2012).

The first implication for higher education practice based on the findings of this study is that community colleges are reliant on their workforce advisory committees to provide monetary funding, equipment, and personal support. The decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions are vital to the success of workforce education programs. The need for collaborations between community college workforce programs and business and industry is essential to offset the expense of operations. The continued budget cuts in higher education are burdening faculty, students, and programs (Oliff et al., 2013). The initial start-up costs for a program is costly without partnering with business and industry (Carlson et al., 2011). To keep workforce programs funded, equipment and internships available, and a healthy supply of community support available, the advisory committee is central to the success (Meeder & Pawlowski, 2012). However, with the continued budget restraints, collaborations with business and industry are more important than ever and should be treated with respect. Not only is the input from business and industry valuable to the success of the workforce program, but also

their funding and equipment donations are keeping many community college workforce programs in operation.

President Barack Obama (2009), through the American Graduation Initiative (AGI), has tasked community colleges with increasing the number of graduates they produce by 250,000 each year through the year 2020. The AGI emphasizes workforce education program collaborations with business and industry, and government partners to create tailored training programs (Obama, 2009). Unfortunately, complex decisions regarding program development, program discontinuity, decision processes, and decision justification (Greenstone & Looney, 2011; Holzer, 2008) is facing community college administrators. The goal of community college workforce programs is to provide relevant training and skills; however, continual budget constraints continue to force administrators to make complex decisions (Bray, 2011). If more workforce department chairs do not lobby for funding, equipment, and professional advice from business and industry, it will be increasingly difficult for community colleges to reach President Obama's AGI numbers.

A second implication for higher education is that the failure of effective decision-making processes will affect the success of workforce education programs. The decisions used with business in industry are fundamentally sound and based off skill sets needed now and for years to come (Kilcrease, 2011). The decisions business and industry make include probable future revenue for graduates of community college workforce programs and for the businesses and industries themselves. The decisions are based off perseverance, tenacity, consistency, and evaluation of the overall product. Decision-making is built on years of experience, track records, time and a commitment to

the process. As noted by Allingham (2002) and Burke and Miller (1999), it is difficult to make decisions, especially for someone else's company, but it comes down to confidence and the belief in the ability to make decisions as a committee. The findings of this study indicate that all of the participants agree that the keys to making good decisions are knowing what to ask, how to ask it, and the ability to assess the actual needs in a community.

A third implication for higher education practice based on the findings of this study is that the effect of strong, involved leadership of the department chair working cohesively with the advisory committee leader has an effect on the outcomes of the workforce education program (Burke & Miller, 1999; Johnson, 2013; Northouse, 2013). Key individuals are important to a group trying to achieve a common goal because they have the ability to influence others to follow their directive (Northouse, 2013). This leadership style can transform the advisory committee into a powerful asset being led by consultants and executives sharing their experiences with workforce programs at the community colleges. As noted by Johnson (2013), having enthusiastic and committed members on the advisory committee results in the overall success of the workforce education program; as well as does having experienced, articulate, and confident leadership on the committee (Meeder & Pawlowski, 2012). To create unity between the members, a strong leader will assist members to see the benefits associated with making concessions and negotiating, and best serve the workforce education program needs (Burke & Miller, 1999; Johnson, 2013; Northouse, 2013). Including individuals on the advisory committee that have the ability and commitment to make decisions and committed to a course of action creates stability on the committee (Mintzberg, 1979).

A final implication for higher education practice based on the findings of this study is that working collaboratively to make informed decisions for community college workforce education programs is a challenge. Meeder and Pawlowski (2012) support having strong, vocal, and confident leadership on the advisory committee, which they perceive results in ownership of the workforce program -- equating to success. Other research supports including individuals who have the ability and commitment to make decisions and who are committed to a course of action (e.g., Mintzberg 1979). All of the participants in this study noted that there are challenges in working collaboratively to make decisions. To create unity between the members, a strong leader will assist members of a committee to see the benefits associated with making the best decisions to serve the needs of the workforce education program (Burke & Miller, 1999; Johnson, 2013; Northouse, 2013). DiMattina (2014) stresses that it is important for advisory committee members to be knowledgeable of the field they are in and serve on many committees in the community as the voice for their industry. Allingham (2002) and Burke and Miller (2011) found that the decisions that colleges and business and industry make are complex and the perspectives and expertise of multiple members are necessary. Dixon (1990) and Bess and Dee (2008) support that a successful advisory committee will consist of individuals with varying leadership experiences and management styles, with transparency in the decision-making process a critical element to the success of the committee.

Recommendations for Higher Education Practice

The results of this study have produced multiple recommendations for higher education practice. Since budgets for community colleges are being decreased each year

the legislature is in session (Oliff et al., 2013), seeking alternative funding for cost demanding workforce programs is vital. As reflected in this study, due to the decreasing resources that community colleges have available, workforce education programs have to do more with less.

The first recommendation for higher education practice based on the findings of this study is that community colleges should strive to work collaboratively with business and industry through their workforce advisory committees to help seek additional funding for their workforce programs. It has become a necessity to have influential members in the community serve on the committee and take an active role in leadership, including meeting with other business and industry members, to help secure funds and to encourage the donation of the most up-to-date equipment in the industry to the programs (Meeder & Pawlowski, 2012; Northouse, 2013). Without the community college workforce education program collaborating with business and industry, very few if any workforce programs will run efficiently and no new start-up programs will be in the budget without taking from another program (Carlson et al., 2011).

The second recommendation for higher education is that the decision-making processes utilized by community colleges must be collaborative and are dependent on the workforce advisory committee. The collaborations established with workforce programs through their advisory committee provide direct access to current business and industry information, including what skills are needed in the workforce. The decisions used with business in industry are fundamentally sound and are based on skill sets needed now and in the future (Kilcrease, 2011). The decision-making processes used in business and industry are based off of years of experience and are being shared through the advisory

committee to support the workforce programs (Jones, 2006; Spector, 2012).

The third recommendation for higher education practice based on the findings of this study is that community colleges must allow the workforce department chairs the freedom to seek out alliances with business and industry with the full support of the college. If the college hires deans and department chairs with years of working experience in the local community, this creates an open door for potential collaborations. It takes a unique workforce personality and established rapport combined with business and industry leaders to create a successful workforce advisory committee (DiMattina, 2014; Meeder & Pawlowski, 2012). This requires a delicate balance of personalities and leadership to gain funding, equipment, and leadership from the community leaders (Carlson et al., 2011; Northouse, 2013). The appointment of a department chair who has the knowledge in the field, connections to the community, and the diligence to work on building and sustaining relationships in the community will allow the advisory committee to secure effective members from the community for workforce program success (Hodges, 2012; Perna, 2012).

The final recommendation for higher education practice is for community colleges and business and industry to work collaboratively to make informed decisions about workforce education programs. This can be accomplished through networking during advisory committee meetings and sharing of information. Advisory committees should include networking as part of the decision-making process to help create programs, obtain resources, and develop public awareness of the training programs (GIPWE, 2015; THECB, 2013). Networking is particularly valuable to advisory committees because business and industry leaders utilize networking to combine efforts

to train highly qualified workers by sharing materials, supplies, equipment, and services (Carlson et al., 2011). The decision-making processes for community college workforce education programs involve networking by key business and educational leaders combining their knowledge and skills (Bess & Dee, 2008) in an effort to produce a quality workforce education program.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study on the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs lead to additional research needs. The first study needed is one that explores how the decisions made by advisory committees relative to workforce education programs affect the completion rates of workforce education students. Of specific interest is how the curriculum offered prepares students and how leaving the program at different milestones affects the success of the student.

Another study that could advance the understanding of the widespread use of advisory committees is how useful an advisory committee consortium would be to the workforce education program. Community colleges in particular areas experience tremendous support and collaborations with major businesses and industries. Many of the collaborations with business and industry include global corporations in other communities that do not have an established rapport or connection. Expanding the membership of local advisory committees to members outside the local community may lead to more effective practices within advisory committees that could perhaps lead to impacts on the global economy.

Another study that could expand the practice of higher education relative to advisory committees is to explore student perceptions through qualitative research of their membership on advisory committees. This study could help the workforce advisory committees identify practices that are valued from the students' perspectives, which could lead to the identification of and implementation of practices institution wide.

A final study that is recommended to further the understanding of the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and advisory committee members to make informed decisions for academic programs is to replicate this current study among community colleges throughout the state of Texas, as well as other states to explore the decision making processes utilized by their workforce advisory committees. Gathering additional data will enable a list of best practices to be developed that can be generalized across a broader context.

Conclusion

Since community colleges serve a large percentage of minority and low socio-economic status (AACC, 2014), they are prepared and capable of producing and educated workforce in the U.S. This supports President Obama's American Graduation Initiative to educate and provide skills for jobs of the future (Obama, 2009). Nonetheless, continual budget constraints continue to be placed on community colleges by the legislature. This creates difficult decisions for the community college administrations regarding programs to discontinue, develop, or streamline. The budget restrictions affect the workforce programs especially hard because they require expensive machinery and equipment.

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific foci were the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process. The findings of this study will advance higher education practice by providing empirical evidence of the processes and strategies used by community college practitioners and advisory committee members that are perceived to be effective in making informed decisions about workforce education programs.

This qualitative study, conducted through the lens of naturalistic inquiry, utilized a collective case study design that was used to address the four research questions. The settings for this study were two West Texas public community colleges located in the South Plains region of Texas. Participants in this study were four purposefully selected community college practitioners and four members of workforce education program advisory committees at the study institutions. Data collection for this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and institutional documents. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was conducted through the constant-comparative method to identify themes using axial coding. Once coding was completed, field notes of institutional documents were used to triangulate the emerging themes and support the findings. In addition, trustworthiness of the study was ensured by measures to address dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability.

The results of the study illustrate that community college workforce education

programs make decisions through their advisory committees. Research question one sought to understand what the participants perceived to be effective practices and strategies in the decision-making process related to workforce programs. The themes that emerged included voice of business and industry, equal representation and balance, and decision-making process. Research question two addressed perceptions of challenges to working collaboratively. The themes that emerged were a lack of knowledge regarding educational system, hiring employees and completers, and workforce respect and trust. The third research question explored the perceptions of the participants of the decision-making process of business and industry and how it affects the decisions made for workforce education programs. The themes that emerged were internships create critical thinkers, sets direction of programs, and support of the college. The final research question sought to understand the participants perceptions about collaborative decision-making. The themes that emerged were wide range of active community members, networking opportunities, and honesty and transparency.

The results of this study led to several implications for higher education practice. The first is that community colleges are reliant on their workforce advisory committees to provide monetary funding, equipment, and personal support. The second implication is that the failure of effective decision-making processes will affect the success of workforce education programs. The third implication is that the effect of strong, involved leadership of the department chair working collaboratively with the advisory committee leader has an effect on the outcomes of the workforce education program. The final implication is that working collaboratively to make informed decisions for community college workforce education programs is a challenge.

The recommendations for higher education practice based on the findings of this study are that community colleges should strive to work collaboratively with business and industry through their workforce advisory committees to help seek additional funding for their workforce programs. The second recommendation is that the decision-making processes utilized by community colleges must be collaborative and are dependent on the workforce advisory committee. The third recommendation is that community colleges must allow the workforce department chairs the freedom to seek out alliances with business and industry, with the full support of the college. The final recommendation is that community colleges and business and industry need to work collaboratively to make informed decisions about workforce education programs.

The findings of this study lead to future research suggestions. The first is a qualitative study that explores how the decisions made by advisory committees relative to workforce education programs affect the completion rates of workforce education students. Another study of interest how useful an advisory committee consortium would be to the workforce education programs of community colleges. A qualitative study could be conducted to explore having students as members of workforce advisory committees. A final study suggested is to replicate this current study throughout the state of Texas as well as other states to explore the decision-making processes of workforce advise committees in order to order to obtain results that may be generalizable to a wider context.

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APPENDIX A



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
Vice President *for* Research

February 3, 2015

Dr. Stephanie Jones, Ed Psychology & Leadership Mail Stop: 1071

Regarding: 505002 Perceptions of and Experiences with the Decision-Making Processes Utilized by Community College Practitioners and Workforce Advisory Committee Members to Make Informed Decisions

Dr. Stephanie Jones:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee approved your claim for an exemption for the protocol referenced above on February 3, 2015.

Exempt research is not subject to continuing review. However, any modifications that (a) change the research in a substantial way, (b) might change the basis for exemption, or (c) might introduce any additional risk to subjects must be reported to the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) before they are implemented.

To report such changes, you must send a new claim for exemption or a proposal for expedited or full board review to the HRPP. Extension of exempt status for exempt protocols that have not changed is automatic.

The HRPP staff will send annual reminders that ask you to update the status of your research protocol. Once you have completed your research, you must inform the HRPP office by responding to the annual reminder so that the protocol file can be closed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rosemary Cogan".

Rosemary Cogan, Ph.D., ABPP

Protection of Human Subjects Committee

Box 41075 | Lubbock, Texas 79409-1075 | T 806.742.3905 | F 806.742.3947 |
www.vpr.ttu.edu An EEO/Affirmative Action Institution

Appendix B

Email to College Official

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Neal and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University in the higher education program that concentrates on community college administration. I am conducting a study that explores the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific focus will be the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process. I am requesting your assistance in conducting this study at your institution. If you agree, I am also asking your help in sending the below email script and Description of the Study to full-time workforce faculty, who you perceive participate in workforce advisory committees at your institution and who have a minimum of two years of employment at the college. The participants will be asked to participate in one (1) 60-minute interview.

I truly appreciate your consideration in allowing me to conduct my study at the institution, as well as identifying potential participants. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Julie Neal
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration
Texas Tech University

Email Script to Potential Workforce Faculty Participants

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Neal and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University in the higher education program that concentrates on community college administration. I am conducting a study that explores the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific focus will be the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process. Additional details of the study are provided in the attached Description of the Study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please just let me know that you are willing and provide me your preferred method of contact by responding to this email. Once you have expressed your willingness to participate, I will contact you through your preferred communication method to schedule a 60-minute interview. My email is

julie.neal@ttu.edu or call me at (432) 934-3344.

I sincerely appreciate your time and consideration in participating in this study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Julie Neal
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration
Texas Tech University

APPENDIX C

Description of the Study

What is this project studying?

This study is called “Perceptions of and Experiences with the Decision-Making Processes Utilized by Community College Practitioners and Workforce Advisory Committee Members to make Informed Decisions.” This study will help us explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs.

What would you do if I participate?

In this study, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview. You will be asked a series of questions about your perceptions and experiences.

Can I quit if I become uncomfortable?

Yes, absolutely. Your participation is completely voluntary. Dr. Stephanie J. Jones and the TTU Institutional Review Board have reviewed the interview questions and think you can answer them comfortably. You may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering. You can also stop answering questions at any time. Participating is your choice; however, we do appreciate any help you are able to provide.

How long will my participation take?

We are asking for 60 minutes of your time.

How is my privacy protected?

Pseudonyms will be used to identify participants and their college in the study. None of your personal identifying information will be associated with any data collected or reported.

How will I benefit from participating in this study?

Besides providing the project with valuable information, you will benefit by contributing knowledge to the practice of higher education concerning the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committees.

How can I participate in the study?

Please send an email stating your willingness to participate and communication method to Julie Neal at julie.neal@ttu.edu or call her at (432) 934-3344.

I have some questions about this study. Who can I ask?

1. If you have any questions about this research study, you can contact Julie Neal at (432) 934-3344 or email her at julie.neal@ttu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Stephanie J. Jones, who is supervising this study at (806) 834-1380 or email her at stephanie.j.jones@ttu.edu.

2. TTU also has a Board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can call to ask them questions at 806-742-2064. You can mail your questions to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, or you can email your questions to www.hrpp@ttu.edu.

APPENDIX D

Script to Potential Workforce Advisory Committee Members

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Neal and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University in the higher education program that concentrates on community college administration. I am conducting a study that explores the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific focus will be the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process. Additional details of the study are provided in the attached Description of the Study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please just let me know that you are willing and provide me your preferred method of contact by responding to this email. Once you have expressed your willingness to participate, I will contact you through your preferred communication method to schedule a 60-minute interview. My email is julie.neal@ttu.edu or call me at (432) 934-3344.

I sincerely appreciate your time and consideration in participating in this study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Julie Neal
Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Administration
Texas Tech University

APPENDIX E
Interview Protocol Community College Participants

Interview Protocol: Community College Participants

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewee: Julie Neal

Pseudonym:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I understand that your time is valuable. I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific focus will be the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process.

It is important that I let you know that your identity will be protected in this study through the use of a pseudonym in place of your name. Your pseudonym will be connected with your interview transcript, and at no time will your real name be shared with the data you provide. At this time, what pseudonym would you like to use? (if participant does not identify one, the Co-PI will assign one) In addition, your institution will also be identified in the results of the study by a pseudonym. At no time will your real name or institution be connected to the data you provide.

As a reminder, participation in this study is voluntary, questions can be skipped, and we can stop the interview process any time. If you do not have any questions about the study or the interview process, I will begin audio recording at this time.

Before we get started on specific questions on online learning and institutional policies, I would like to ask you some background questions regarding your teaching experiences.

Questions:

1. Would you please tell me what position you hold with the community college and for how long?
2. Who is most instrumental in the decision-making process relative to decisions about workforce education program curriculum?
3. How are selections of advisory committee members made?
4. Describe the environment of the advisory committee?
5. What is key to running an efficient advisory committee?
6. Who do you consult with about program needs? Why?
7. How do you approach business leaders to serve on the committee?
8. How were meetings arranged and by whom?
9. Who is involved with major business decisions related to your program?
10. Who is involved in minor business decisions related to your program?

11. How is the decision-making process different when large amounts of money are invested?
12. How is the decision-making process different when a specific advisory committee is used?
13. Is a budget bottom line the only indicator used to improve or remove a program?
14. How do you utilize practices of other colleges in your decision making?
15. How do you create a positive atmosphere to achieve successful negotiations?
16. Who and how is it decided which skills are needed and those the college should emphasize through training in a specific workforce program?
17. If the community is requesting a program be added at the college, how does the committee justify adding it or not? What is the decision-making process?
18. How does the committee go about obtaining funding, equipment, and resources a program may need?
19. What are indicators of success for advisory committees?
20. What type of collaborations, challenges, and negotiations occur with advisory members?
21. What do you perceive are effective practices and strategies in the decision making process related to workforce programs?
22. What recommendations do you have for best practices in working with advisory committees?

Once again, I would like to thank you for agreeing to talk with me today.

APPENDIX F
Interview Protocol Advisory Committee Member Participants

Interview Guide: Workforce Advisory Committee Members

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Julie Neal

Interviewee:

Pseudonym:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. I understand that your time is valuable. I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of and experiences with the decision-making processes utilized by community college practitioners and workforce advisory committee members to make informed decisions for workforce education programs. Of specific focus will be the decision-making processes and the strategies used to enhance collaboration between both stakeholders, and those that are perceived to be best practices utilized in the decision-making process.

It is important that I let you know that your identity will be protected in this study through the use of a pseudonym in place of your name. Your pseudonym will be connected with your interview transcript, and at no time will your real name be shared with the data you provide. At this time, what pseudonym would you like to use? (if participant does not identify one, the Co-PI will assign one) In addition, your institution will also be identified in the results of the study by a pseudonym. At no time will your real name or institution be connected to the data you provide.

As a reminder, participation in this study is voluntary, questions can be skipped, and we can stop the interview process any time. If you do not have any questions about the study or the interview process, I will begin audio recording at this time.

Before we get started on specific questions on online learning and institutional policies, I would like to ask you some background questions regarding your teaching experiences.

Questions:

1. Would you please tell me what position you hold in the company and for how long?
2. Is your business local, national, and/or global?
3. How many advisory committees are you on and in what disciplines?
4. Whom do you consult to make difficult decisions related to workforce programs on those committees you are a member of?
5. What is involved in the decision-making process when you consider adding a product or doing away with one?
6. What is usually the determining factor that helps advisory members negotiate?

7. What is the best way to negotiate with other advisory members?
8. What type of individual do you perceive is most effective on an advisory committee?
9. Is any member of the committee more influential than others?
10. How is the decision-making process different when large amounts of money are invested?
11. How do you know and keep up with current or upcoming trends in the industry?
12. How do you justify your decisions made through the committee?
13. What are indicators of success for the advisory committee?
14. Describe the environment of the advisory committee?
15. What type of collaborations, challenges, and negotiations occur within the advisory committee and the college?
16. What do you perceive are effective practices and strategies in the decision making process of workforce advisory committees related to workforce programs?

Once again, I would like to thank you for agreeing to talk with me today.