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THE PROCESS OF INITIATING AND SUSTAINING A LEARNING COLLEGE
CONCEPT:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

KIMBERLY MORROW GOLD

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In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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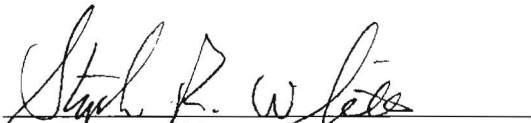
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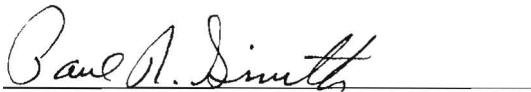
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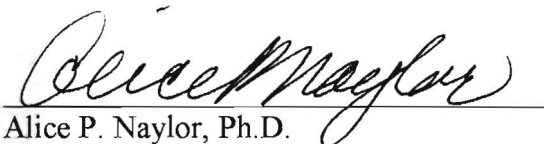
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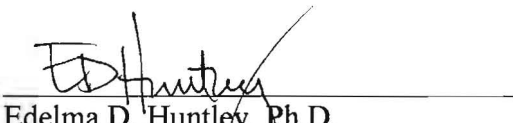
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ABSTRACT

THE PROCESS OF INITIATING AND SUSTAINING A LEARNING COLLEGE

CONCEPT:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY. (December, 2007)

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Over the past 100 years the challenges faced by community colleges have changed dramatically. The leadership philosophies that supported organizations built on the industrial model of efficiency and production are no longer useful. Today's leadership must be focused on adapting to a rapidly changing environment. Because of these challenges this study seeks to describe a leadership philosophy that focuses on transformative change and Learning College principles. This view of leadership is grounded in the theoretical concepts of systems thinking and social constructivism. Each of these concepts offers a lens through which to view the organizational setting.

In contrast to the industrial production model, systems thinking views organizations, as inter-related connections and relationships. In addition, social constructivism addresses the manner in which organizational members engage in meaning making experiences within the organization. Using these concepts as the foundation for this study, this view of leadership focuses on leading organizations that are continuously adapting to a changing environment and views individuals as living beings with unique views of the organization.

In addition, the transformative model of leadership addressed in current literature provides an understanding of the role that leaders play in creating and sustaining the growth and learning process within an organization. This model along with O'Banion's (1997) principles for a Learning College form the framework for examining the role of leaders in transforming community colleges toward a culture of learning.

This study explores the application of this leadership model by examining the perceptions and experiences of employees at one community college. Using a qualitative research methodologies such as semi-structured interviews, document review and participant observation are utilized to explore the aspects of leadership that created and sustained the transformation toward implementing Learning College principles. The findings from this study illustrate the importance of four leadership philosophies; creating a shared vision, a social architecture to facilitate organizational discourse, an investment in the personal growth of individuals and providing feedback for the organization regarding the learning process. This view of leadership provides an understanding not only of the events and actions that have driven the change process but more importantly the meaning and significance that those experiencing the change attached to the leadership philosophies that support this culture of learning.