**Student Affairs Divisions as Learning Organizations: Toward a Conceptual Framework
for Organizational Improvement**

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Studies

Student Affairs Divisions as Learning Organizations: Toward a Conceptual Framework

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The American higher education system is in crisis and in need of reform in order to remain competitive in the 21st century (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006). Given the calls for accountability and transparency by diverse stakeholders seeking improved fiscal, academic, and more importantly, student learning and engagement outcomes, a grounded understanding of organizational improvement is in order.

This dissertation is a qualitative research study in higher education management and on student affairs divisions in particular. The purpose is to develop a conceptual framework for pursuing organizational improvement in student affairs divisions toward the distal goal of improving student learning and engagement outcomes. In doing so, the researcher re-appropriates the concept of a "Learning Organization," and uses it as the foundation upon which to develop the conceptual framework. The researches questions guiding the study instantiate elements of grounded theory methodology and also align with a social constructivist research paradigm. An extensive literature analysis and semi-structured interviews using a modified Delphi process were the primary data collection methods for developing, validating, and revising the conceptual framework. NUD*IST (N6) was used for systematic data analysis.

Study results indicated that student affairs divisions face at least four major challenges: developing a professional identity, aligning diverging interests, understanding the changing student culture, and developing a global perspective for practice. Effectively addressing these

challenges, while supporting a culture of risk-taking and learning, was reported as an indicators of a high quality student affairs organization. Findings also indicated that the revised framework should be practical when tested in student affairs divisions. Results of the study demonstrated that the framework will be practical to scholars seeking to frame critical dialogue and debate about the future direction of the student affairs profession and also found the framework to be a practical tool for encouraging dialogue in higher education and student affairs discourse. Practitioners seeking to improve student learning and engagement outcomes from an organizational perspective, found the revised framework practical for encouraging and pursuing a learning-orientated organizational culture.

This research extends and deepens one's conceptual understanding of organizational improvement and culture in student affairs organizations, as well as frame practical opportunities for pursuing organizational improvement in the broader higher education community. This study contributes to the theoretical and practical discourses on organizational improvement in student affairs, and offers plausible directions for future empirical study.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you so much Jean Ferketish…the opportunities you have provided have been incredible. I appreciate you so much and thank goodness our spirits connected. I hope we can continue this wonderful mentoring relationship.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a qualitative research study in higher education management, focusing on student affairs organizations. The purpose is to develop a conceptual framework, a heuristic tool for understanding and pursuing organizational improvement in student affairs organizations[1]. The intent of this study is to contribute to higher education management literature by proffering this framework as a more humanistic approach to pursuing organizational quality improvement. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the purpose and intent of the study. The researcher describes and analyzes the challenges facing student affairs organizations through an extensive literature analysis. Next, the researcher develops a conceptual framework of interrelated constructs designed to enhance scholars' and practitioners' understanding of student affairs reform from an organizational perspective. The researcher validates the framework using an expert panel of higher education and student affairs scholars and practitioners. The proximal goal is to improve the ways in which student affairs organizations function. The distal goal is to improve student engagement and learning opportunities.

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[1] The researcher uses the terms 'student affairs' 'student affairs organization' and 'student affairs division' interchangeably.
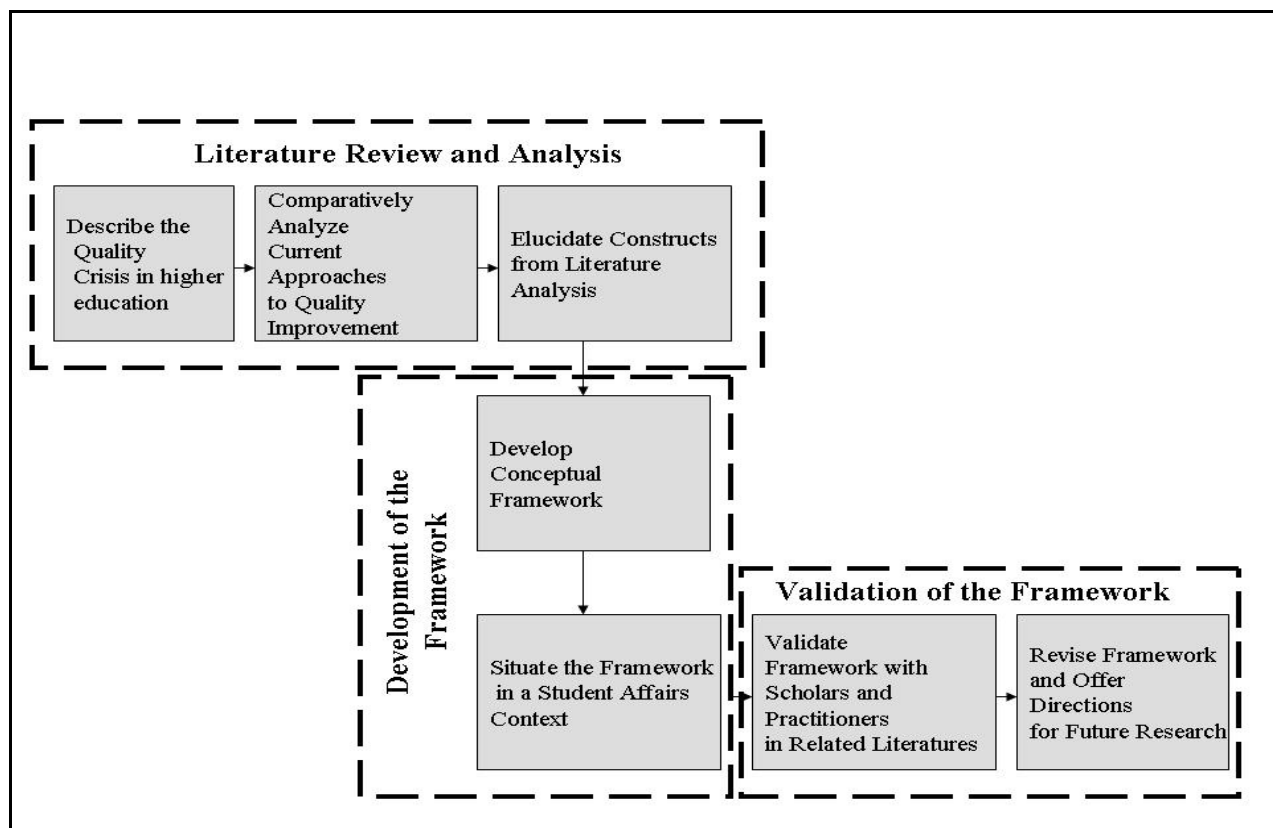
Figure 1: Visual Representation of the Purpose and Intent

The need to improve higher education and student affairs is not a novel concept. A recent report issued by the Federal Commission on Higher Education indicates that the American higher education system is in crisis and in need of reform in order to remain competitive in the 21st century (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006). Articles and reports sharing these sentiments are prominent in the discourse about higher education (Bok, 2006) and have been so for several years (Spencer-Matthews, 2001; Houston & Studman, 2001). Questions about educational cost, quality of instruction, organizational effectiveness, and student outcomes

have barraged educators and administrators to the point that there is no clearly conceptualized, grounded approach to address these growing concerns, just many prescriptive techniques that have been neither sustainable nor permeable to the industry at large. As gatekeepers of federal spending seek to uncover the outcomes of public investments; as parents and students become more consumer–oriented in their decisions about college attendance; as the community looks to these institutions as foundations upon which economies can be built; as other societal concerns such as health care and defense take priority; and as corporate industry continues to see the need for basic training and development of recent college graduates, the quality of higher education institutions continues to concern both internal and external critics.

Essentially, this research is a grounded exploration in which the researcher re-appropriates the "Learning Organization" concept popularized in managerial literature by Senge (1990 and 2006), and uses it as the foundation upon which to develop a conceptual framework for organizational improvement. The learning organization represents an organizational form in which the capacity for individual and group learning continuously expands. In a learning organization, the organization's culture and leadership foster an environment where knowledge acquisition, creation, interpretation, transmission, and application drive organizational transformation and improvement. This claim should be further examined since knowledge management has been cited as a key organizational capacity and source of competitive advantage in today's "knowledge society," or "knowledge-based era" (Allen & Cherry, 2000; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). The Learning Organization concept embraces and supports human agency and the role of organizational members in facilitating or hindering desired organizational outcomes through their constructed realities and interactions within their internal and external environment.

Since the researcher's formal education and work experience is in student affairs (an essential division within higher education institutions), student affairs organizations serve as the lens through which organizational improvement will be investigated. While organizational improvement is the proximal goal of this study, the distal goal is to contribute to improving student engagement and learning opportunities. The quality of these opportunities has been proffered as an indicator of the quality of student affairs organizations (Kuh, 2005; Astin, 1984). Unfortunately, student engagement and learning are areas least addressed by current higher education organizational reform approaches such as academic program review, accreditation, assessment, and total quality management. Student affairs divisions are a plausible setting for examining organizational improvement. The bailiwick of student affairs work is student learning and development and has taken center stage within the higher education reform movement. The student affairs profession also aligns with many of the tenets articulated in the learning organization concept.

This study represents an hour-glass approach (Thomas, personal communication, 2006) to address organizational reform and accountability in higher education. This approach suggests understanding the broader challenges in higher education first, then narrowing the focus of the investigation to a division within higher education (student affairs organizations), and finally offering insights that may be appropriated back out to other areas within higher education institutions. Results from this research extend one's conceptual understanding of organizational processes, activities, and culture in student affairs organizations, as well as frame practical opportunities for pursuing organizational improvement in the broader higher education community. The following sections detail the context and rationale under which this study

evolved, and why this research contributes to higher education management and student affairs literature.

1.1   CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Scholars and practitioners alike mull over the multitude of challenges facing education in general and post secondary education, in particular (Peterson, 1998). Writers from a variety of fields have provided their perspective as to what ails higher education (Bennett, 1994; Bogue, 1992; Duke, 2002; Seymour, 1992; Spanbauer, 1995; Watty, 2003). Rising tuition costs, ill-prepared graduates, lack of accountability, as well as concerns about the overall quality of higher education top the list of issues facing higher education institutions (Seymour, 1992; Ewell, 1998). Buchanan (1995) adds that declining charitable gifts, aging faculty, and declining quality in liberal arts programs also plague higher education. Now, the most pressing are concerns about student learning. In a 2007 report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise (LEAP), the council made it clear that while there are many concerns regarding the direction and future of higher education, there must be an emphasis on examining what college students need to know and whether higher education is facilitating this knowledge development (LEAP, 2007). Kezar and Eckel (2002) contend that, "the array of challenges that higher education faces today is virtually unparalleled when compared to any other period in U.S. history" (p. 436). Illustrating the need to improve higher education, Love and Love (1996) submit:

> Furthermore, higher education has struggled for a long time with the
>
> increasing fragmentation of the learning process, of disciplines and

5

knowledge, of the administrative structure, and of community. Strong

cultural forces have acted as barriers to efforts at reforming and

transforming higher education… but now forces within and out of higher

education have gathered that are exerting tremendous pressure on the

entire enterprise…The need for reform is clear. (p.iii)

Currently, improvement initiatives tend to focus on areas such as academics (i.e., curriculum

review and reform; teaching and instruction, etc.), administrative/business functions (i.e.,

resource allocation, facilities, support services, etc.). Improvement efforts are often pursued

through professional associations, accrediting agencies, or strong institutional and divisional

leadership. More recently, the content of and gains in student learning have surfaced as an

important areas of examination. These foregoing improvement initiatives—which represent

content, processes, and outcomes, respectively—abound in the literature, but little research

examines other factors that impact organizational quality such as people—their activities, social

processes, and work practices. The demands by various stakeholders have undoubtedly caused

some members of the higher education community to seek a better understanding of how to

improve organizations in order to meet the ever-growing demands for reform and accountability.

This study seeks to contribute to this understanding.

Student affairs organizations are not immune to the myriad criticisms aimed at

uncovering the value, the cost, and the contribution of their work to individuals, organizations,

and the greater society. These divisions often become the target of direct criticism within higher

education, since their role tends to be unclear and the resources expended sometimes do not

appear to link to the core goals of an institution. In addition, as an intermediary between key

stakeholders (students and their families) and the greater higher education community (Laliberte,

2003), student affairs organizations become the center for either continued blame or the resolution of conflict.

Because the student affairs profession espouses student learning and development as its primary goal and since the quality and content of student learning is at the forefront of the calls for reform and accountability in today's knowledge society, developing a conceptual framework to create learning organizations in student affairs organizations addresses a conceptual need in higher education. Higher education administrators and student affairs professionals must change their thinking regarding the activities, processes, and practices that are embedded in organizational cultures so that learning becomes to prominent activity.

This context provides the basis for why this study is necessary. The conceptual framework developed herein seeks to enhance understanding of how to improve student affairs in order impact student learning, development, and engagement outcomes. It reflects a humanistic and social constructivist perspective regarding organizations and honors how people intrinsically learn, change, and seek to improve. 'Humanistic' refers to the affirmation of value, respect, dignity, and both the personal and professional development of the people working in organizations. This perspective in organizational improvement is imperative for several reasons and reflects the current higher education landscape.

First, for the past several years, diverse internal and external stakeholders have questioned the quality of the higher education enterprise. The reasons are voluminous and diverse. For example, the government seeks to determine the outcomes of public investments and wants higher education to make those outcomes more transparent (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Parents and students have become more consumer–oriented in their decisions about college attendance. These critical stakeholders want accurate and reliable information to

help families compare institutional characteristics and understand what they are receiving for the investment they are making. The community looks to colleges and universities as foundations upon which local economies can thrive. Thus, concerns about services provided to surrounding communities abound. Societal concerns such as health care and national defense continue to take center stage, calling into question the exorbitant costs associated with operating higher education institutions. Finally, industry continues to see the need for basic training and development of recent college graduates and therefore questions learning and engagement outcomes, curriculum, and the quality of work/life preparation provided to students. A humanistic and constructivist approach considers equally the diversity of these concerns.

Second, current improvement initiatives to assuage the concerns of stakeholders fall short of comprehensively addressing the aforementioned issues, as well as the imminent and emerging concerns of the future. Several reasons are attributable to their weaknesses. With an over reliance on prescription, each approach addresses only a narrow area of concern. For example, academic program review focuses on curriculum (Bogue & Hall, 2003); accreditation focuses on institutional inputs and processes, as well as seeks baseline standards; and outcomes assessment focuses on outcomes of student learning (Banta & Associates, 1993). Total Quality Management (TQM) focuses on the entire organizational systems, but has a history, language, and culture proven not to be transferable to higher education (Birnbaum, 2000; Koch & Fisher, 1998). Finally, in addition to their narrow foci, the current approaches are utilized and researched through a predominately instrumental orientation. This suggests that improvement is pursued as a means to compliance or as means to economic, political, or capitalists ends first and sometimes solely. However, higher education has a broader purpose to prepare students for meaningful,

productive, and fulfilling lives (AAC&U, 1997). A learning-orientated approach such as the learning organization, considers this broader purpose.

The third reason a humanistic and social constructivist perspective is imperative is because higher education management is practitioner-based; however, most of the current quality assurance approaches lack substantive conceptual underpinnings to shape that practice (Aktouf, 1992). Van de Ven and Poole (1989) suggests that there is nothing as practical as a good theory. Thus, the conceptual framework developed herein illustrates an approach to organizational improvement based less on instrumental orientations of organizational functioning, but more on the humanistic aspects of organizational improvement—opening a discourse that can change current practice.

The researcher proposes that becoming a learning organization could mitigate many concerns regarding higher education, as it addresses the human aspect of organizational functioning. The paucity of humanistic approaches in higher education management and student affairs literature represents a significant gap in the literature. This dearth of research also illuminates the overly prescriptive and instrumental nature of current organizational research, which leaves current approaches, strategies, and tools for improvement subject to criticisms of being a passing fad. A conceptually grounded framework for organizational functioning is a requisite for sustaining improvement efforts (Landel, personal communication, 2007). Table 1 summarizes the reasons why a different approach to organizational improvement is needed.

Table 1: Rationale for a Different Approach to Organizational Improvement

Rationale	Examples
Persistence pressure for accountability and reform from internal and external stakeholders	Government, communities, parents, students, and industry
Lack of shared understanding of how to address concerns and improve outcomes	Compliance vs. status quo maintenance vs. accountability vs. Transformation
Weaknesses of current quality improvement approaches	Narrow focus, lack of conceptual foundations, prescription-orientated
Dominance of instrumental/functional views of organizations	Academic program review, accreditation, TQM, etc.

1.2   EPISTIMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions from humanistic and social constructivist theories guide and inform this research study. Humanism examines the role and behavior of people in organized activities (Aktouf, 1992). Wooten and Crane (2004) suggest that organizational research neglects humanistic processes in organizational life such as motivation, job satisfaction, as well as personal and professional development. Aktouf (1992) contends that a concern for the well-being of others does not permeate organizational cultures. Additionally, a humanistic perspective considers the diversity of ideas from multiple stakeholders and the knowledge created by them. Decades ago, Kaplan and Tausky (1977) wrote that a humanistic approach focuses on developing meaningful routines that allow staff members to engage in decision making. Humanistic theories fundamentally assume that great potential exists in humans when provided opportunities to utilize their skills, gifts, and talents. Alvesson's work (1992) offers a humanistic organization theory that emphasizes people's contributions to organizational efficiency and leads to higher productivity and work satisfaction—leading to improved outcomes and goal achievement. Although the wave of humanistic study receded with the rise of other assumptions about

organizational life, the researcher assumes that a contemporary humanistic approach to organizational improvement is a plausible compliment to the current instrumental approaches employed by higher education institutions today. In addition, humanism also aligns well with assumptions of student affairs professions (discussed further in Chapter Two).

Social constructivism suggests that people in social settings construct and constitute reality and knowledge. Thus, multiple realities can exist simultaneously. Savery and Duffy (1995) note, "Knowledge evolves through social negotiation and through the evaluation of the viability of individual understandings" (as cited in Luedekke, 1999, p. 31). Given that organizations today exist in a knowledge era and knowledge will be a key competitive advantage (Senge, 1990; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), organizational members play a critical role in determining what is knowledge, how knowledge will become embedded in the organizational culture, and how that knowledge will drive organizational reform. Additionally, from a social constructivist standpoint, learning is a social process (Gepphart, 2000). Teppo (1997) suggests that social constructivism "views learning as the enculturation of an individual into a community of practice, and the focus of inquiry is placed on the individual's participation in social practice" (p. 3). From this perspective, organizations are an ideal setting for learning to occur.

Since this study assumes a humanistic and social constructivist paradigm using elements of grounded theory methods, the aim is to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features" (Johnson, 1995, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 4).

These underlying assumptions and mental models are evident in the conception and design of the study; the review and analysis of the data; the development and validation of the framework; as well as the results, discussion, and recommendations for future studies. They

situate this study in a broader disciplinary and methodological research community as well as support the rationale for the study (described in section 1.1)

1.3   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This study introduces a different approach to understanding and pursuing organizational reform in higher education that moves the dominant instrumental paradigm of organizational life to a humanistic one. A grounded conceptual framework will help build cumulative knowledge about organizational reform in higher education and builds upon the recommendations of other researchers.

This study contributes to the theoretical discourse in higher education and student affairs research and offers plausible directions for future empirical study. Hatch (1997) argues that theories and frameworks allow practitioners to abstractly study phenomenon, consider a range plausible solutions and explanations, and then return to their practice with innovative ways to respond to challenges. This study contributes to higher education management literature, because as Kezar (2005) asserts, "Direct and clear reference to organizational learning and the learning organization within the literature in higher education is infrequent" (p. 14). It contributes particularly to student affairs organizations, because as Berger and Milem (2000) suggests, studies rarely examine organizational behavior as a factor that impacts student learning and development outcomes. They suggest that organization behavior theory could elaborate upon existing models of college impact, but that this has not been attended to by scholars. Like Berger and Milem's recommendation, examining higher education and student affairs organizations from an organizational perspective should be done with goal of improving the learning and

engagement experiences provided to students. This framework is also significant because it draws upon multiple theories and concepts useful for understanding higher education, which Berger and Milem (2000) suggest is an emerging practice.

2.0   STUDENT AFFAIRS AND THE LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS:

A LIKELY NEXUS

2.1   STUDENT AFFAIRS

This chapter describes the relationship between student affairs and the learning organization concept as well as the relationship among these concepts, as they represent the foundation upon which the conceptual framework was developed.

Essentially, student affairs can be understood in three ways: from the perspective of the profession, the practitioner, and the organization. Today, the student affairs profession is designed to support and facilitate the learning and development of college students primarily outside of the classroom; however its role in higher education institutions has evolved over several decades. Faced with challenges emanating from role confusion, identity crisis, and the birth of a new field of study, the profession has sought to etch a place in colleges and universities leading scholars to draw upon research from several interdisciplinary theories to articulate the student affairs position. These theories underpin the educational practice of many student affairs professionals. These theories include for example, student development, human development, adult learning theories, behavioral-cognitive theories, learning, psychology, and constructivist pedagogy, to name a few. In theory, the student affairs professional represents the epicenter for

understanding how student learning and development occurs as well as ways in which this learning and development can be optimized.

Student affairs practitioners help young adults find meaning and purpose in their lives through intentionally designed learning opportunities developed and facilitated in student affairs organizations. Therefore, the construction of knowledge is inherent in the activities and practices of student affairs organizations. Student affairs professionals fundamentally seek to "create learning environments and learning experiences for students" (Laliberte, 2003, p. 1). Understanding student affairs from the practitioner perspective illuminates some common qualities and characteristics of those who choose to enter the field.

Student affairs organizations function to provide opportunities for students to engage in self-discovery, personal development, and life-long learning. A student affairs organization is the division within a college or university that deals primarily with the co-curricular life of college students. It includes many of the services and programs once provided by college presidents and other faculty members such as academic advising, discipline, housing, and career placement. Prior to terms like "student affairs" or "college student personnel," programs and services not related to academic pursuits were rudimentary—if they even existed. Functional areas of today's student affairs organizations emerged from the early 1890s at Harvard with the establishment of a Dean of Men who oversaw academic advising as well as the judicial process (Laliberte, 2003). Alice Freeman Palmer at the University of Chicago became the first Dean of Women in 1892. The Dean of Women position would lay the foundation for what would become the developmental work of student affairs, as programs and services were intentionally designed to meet the needs of women (Laliberte, 2003).

In these early years, leading scholars and practitioners worked to create a cohesive identity. It was not until the 1937 publication of the Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV) that student affairs ushered its way into higher education (Laliberte, 2003). The SPPV represented a milestone within the profession and was developed by personnel workers and scholars who organized student affairs philosophy, concepts, and practices. The document not only outlined the functional areas within the profession, but also provided blueprints to assist with professionalizing the field within the academy. As other activities became functions of student affairs and new knowledge about learning and human development was incorporated in to the professional literature, the 1937 document was revised in 1949 and further articulated the role of the student affairs in higher education (Laliberte, 2003). It provided a clear rationale for the work being conducted (Laliberte, 2003). Notably, the document states, "The development of students as whole persons interacting in social situations is the central concern of student personnel work and of other agencies of education" (SPPV, 1949 p.17). This social constructivist view of the profession permeates many student affairs organizations on college campuses. However, the extent to which the espoused assumptions and values align with the enacted processes, activities, and practices taking place in these organizations varies in both degree and quality. This alignment was challenged during the 1960s and 1970s campus unrest (Laliberte, 2003) and is still problematic today.

As a result of campus unrest in the 1960s and 1970s, student affairs professionals served as leaders in resolving campus conflicts (Laliberte, 2003). It was a tumultuous time where student affairs professionals became the connection between students and administration. It provided an opportunity to reconsider the value of student affairs within the larger educational enterprise. A need to re-conceptualize the role of student affairs in the larger higher education

became clear (Bloland, Stamatakos, & Rogers, 1994). The concept of "student development" emerged as a framework for the reform movement within the student affairs profession; student development theory became the foundation of professional practice. However, this framework, like the SPPV, does not fully translate into practice, graduate preparation programs, or professional development opportunities (Bloland, Stamatakos, & Rogers, 1994).

This lingering disconnect between what student affairs espouses and what is actually done in student affairs organizations has caused some to suggest that the effectiveness of student affairs organizations should be evaluated (Wheelan & Danganan, 2003). Jacoby (1989) finds that many student affairs professionals construct the meaning of their work based on divergent views of profession, and that this lack of a shared vision and common mental models impact efforts to reform and improve. The question becomes "improvement of what, for what, and toward what end?" In addition, diverse perspectives regarding the role of student affairs within the higher education community have unfortunately created silos among student affairs practitioners and scholars (Blimling, 2005; Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002)—disconnecting professional practice from theory and research.

Consequently, what constitutes a "quality" student affairs organization has not been explicitly expressed. However, clues from the current landscape of accountability and quality management in higher education focus on enhancing student learning and development outcomes (Commission on Higher Education, 2006). This focus has also become a more prominent measure of quality within the student affairs organizations (Banta & Associates, 1993; Ewell, 1991). Thus, the student affairs organization, in the context of contributing to higher education reform, is relevant and timely for study.

The researcher selects student affairs organizations as the context for developing the learning organization framework four main reasons. First, the student affairs profession has a disposition similar to the epistemological assumptions of the researcher in its development of college students (Brown, 1972)—helping students construct meaning, make decisions, and build their capacity for life-long learning. The culture of the student affairs profession is, to the greatest extent, amenable to a learning-orientated disposition of organizational functioning, a tenet which permeates the learning organization concept. This disposition suggests that people are self-determining with a capacity to develop healthy, fulfilling lives. This philosophy is noted in the student affairs literature related to students as well (Love & Love, 1995). Student affairs scholarship and practice draw heavily on developmental, cognitive, and behavioral theories as well as a constructivist pedagogy, all of which represent humanistic epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions. These assumptions also ground the learning organization discourse.

Second, student affairs provides a focus for the research study given the complexity and loose-coupling of higher education institutions (Weick, 1976), as well as a broader movement to document student learning outcomes. Third, the framework could be useful for improving the organizational quality not only in student affairs, but other areas of the academy where student learning and development is an important outcome. Blimling's (2001) research indicates that most innovations for improving quality have failed in student affairs organizations. Numerous reports have sent clarion calls for student affairs organizations to improve professional practice, the student experience, and student learning outcomes. Table 2 provides a listing of the most prominent accounts.

Table 2: Reports on Reform in Student Affairs

Report	Author (Year)
A Perspective on Student Affairs	NASPA (1987)
Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs	ACPA & NASPA (1997)
Reasonable Expectations: Renewing the Educational Compact Between Institutions and Students	Kuh, Lyons, Miller, & Trow (1994)
The Student Learning Imperative	ACPA (1994)
CAS Standards	Council for the Advancement of Standards (1988)
Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning	American Association of Higher Education, ACPA, NASPA (1998)
Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education	National Institute of Education (1984)
Campus Life: In Search of Community	Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990)
Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education	Chickering and Garrison (1987)
Report of the Wingspread Group on Higher Education	Wingspread Group (1993)
Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities	National Association of State and Land-Grant Colleges (1997)
Leadership Reconsidered: Engaging in Higher Education in Social Change	Astin & Astin (2000)
Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience	Boyer Commission (1998)

Finally, the researcher's educational and professional background is in student affairs, so practical experiences can inform the emerging conceptual framework. A cogent relationship exists between the concept of a learning organization and student affairs. This relationship can be used as a tool for understanding and improving student affairs organizations. The next section discusses the learning organization concept in more detail and further expresses its nexus with student affairs.

2.2   THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION

The learning organization concept, popularized in managerial literature by Peter Senge (1990) represents an organizational form in which the capacity for individual and group learning continuously expands (Garvin, 1993; Senge 1990). It also represents a dynamic and organic view of organizational functioning—the extent to which organizational members are continuously engaged in opportunities to reflect, learn, reflect again, and then use cognitive and effective skill domains. The learning organization concept suggests that a key to improved organizational functioning is the ability to continually learn. Learning becomes a necessity given that organizations are functioning in a knowledge-driven economy (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Authors from many diverse fields have put forth definitions of the learning organization dating back to the 1970's, from Chris Aygris to as recent as scholars such as Senge (1990, 2006), Garvin (1993, 2000), Dibella and Nevis (1998), to name a few. The robustness (and to some—ambiguity) of the work related to the concept is due, in part, to the lack of an agreed upon articulation of what a "learning organization" is (Garvin, 2000; Kerka, 1995), the essential elements that separate a learning organization from other organizational types (Kline & Saunders, 1998; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000), and how to develop learning organizations.

In addition, the learning organization literature in popular press is very management and practitioner-based, lending it to critiques of being a passing managerial fad (Birnbaum, 2000; Kezar, 2005). However, Peter Senge's (1990) seminal work has not only permeated organization and business literature, but also an emerging discourse drawing upon disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and other academic disciplines. This discourse, with varied outcomes, attempts to uncover theoretical and practical insights regarding organizational improvement

areas such as organizational behavior, motivation, social systems, knowledge management, group and team dynamics, leadership, organizational processes, etc.

Unfortunately, much of the research regarding the learning organization is preoccupied with creating prescriptions for creating the learning organization. This preoccupation has led to a lack of grounded theoretical advancements and understanding of the learning organization concept's vast potential (Smith, 2001).

Since there is a plethora of resources extant in the literature that provides a myriad of guidelines, techniques, and tools for creating a learning organization, the remainder of this section briefly addresses two fundamental issues presented earlier: what is a learning organization and what are the essential elements of a learning organization? The purpose of addressing these questions is to help frame why a theoretically grounded approach to creating a learning organization framework is useful and needed in higher education as well as how the work related to the concept is well aligned with the work in student affairs.

What is a Learning Organization?

Scholars have conceptualized the term "learning organization" in a variety of ways including a paradigm (Schein, 1990), a culture (Schien, 1992), a philosophy (Dever, 1997), and a model (Caldwell, 2005). Dilworth (1995) asserts that the learning organization is the confluence of continuous improvement and continuous learning. The learning organization is an ideal, "towards which organizations have to evolve in order to be able to respond to the various pressures" (Finger & Brand, 1999, p. 136). Similarly, a learning company is an organization that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself (Pedler et al.., 1991). Watkins and Marsick (1999) contend that in a learning organization, "people are aligned around a common vision: they sense and interpret their changing environment. They generate new

knowledge which they use, in turn, to create innovative products and services to meet customer needs" (p.10). Marquardt (1996) asserts that a learning organization is one that seeks to use shared knowledge and that empowers all stakeholders to integrate learning and working in order to maximize both production and learning in order transform.

Notably, common among these definitions are the elements of teamwork, people-orientation, learning (individual and organizational), knowledge management, leadership, and continuous improvement. In addition, the idea of the learning organization emphasizes humanistic considerations that are critical to sustained improvement efforts. A learning organization framework can provide the requisite language, meaning, and cultural interpretation needed to improve and sustain quality in higher education and student affairs organizations.

Understandably, the learning organization concept has not been accepted by all as a cure to organizational ills. In fact, as a result of the concept's diversity in meaning, application, and practice, some scholars contend, as noted previously, that it is simply the next iteration in a long tradition of management fads (Schwandt, 1995). This notion poses challenges for researchers and scholars who seek to develop an integrated conceptual foundation upon which empirical investigations can be pursued.

Essential Elements of Learning Organizations

Conceptually, the learning organization is very similar to TQM and shares many of its basic tenets. Senge (1995) comments that implementing TQM processes and techniques is the first step in creating learning organizations, as they are more immediate and visible. Unfortunately, the language of TQM and its emphasis on statistical control and process reengineering has not translated well within the higher education environment. Senge's work delineates five disciplines that must be studied and mastered (Senge, 2000). He further writes,

"A discipline is a developmental path for acquiring certain skills or competencies" (Senge, 1990, p. 10). While extensive treatments of the disciplines are extant in the literature, a summary of the disciplines are enumerated in Table 3 and further analyzed in the subsequent paragraphs. It is important to note that while these disciplines appear to be actionable items, they serve more as a framework of what should be done, but not how to do it. Thus, they are written as essential elements of the learning organization because they entail the cumulative work of those who preceded Senge and those who have built upon his work.

Table 3: Senge's Five Disciplines

Discipline	Key Points
Building Shared Vision	• **Developing** a picture of the future that entails the needs of organizational members
Surfacing and Testing Mental Models	• **Reflecting** on deeply held assumptions about views of the world and reality around it • Articulating clearly one's perspective, holding it up for scrutiny, and/or using it to influence others
Mastering Self	• **Creating** the results in life that organizational members truly seek • Meditating on personal visions, sources of energy
Learning in Teams	Using the practices of dialogue and discussion and distinguishing between both: • **Dialogue** - free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep "listening" to one another and suspending of one's own views • **Discussion** - different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the best view to support decisions that must be made at this time
Thinking Systematically	• **Seeing** interrelationships and patterns of systems rather than linear cause-effect chains. Seeing processes of change rather than snapshots

"Building a Shared Vision" is the leadership discipline that requires organizational leaders to translate their personal visions into shared visions that bring organizational members together. Unlike creating traditional "vision statements," this discipline requires that more than one person is committed to actively and personally working toward a common goal. This discipline is essential to the learning organization as it serves as a motivator and "provides a focus and energy for learning" (Senge, 1990, p. 10). The evolving and changing role of student affairs in higher education has made building a shared vision quite a challenge for the student affairs profession as a whole. Given the diversity of higher education institutions, it is also no surprise that student affairs divisions reflect differing visions of their roles within the institution. In some instances, there is perhaps a disconnection between the ethos of the profession and the division's role required within a particular institution. Thus, a shared vision in a student affairs organization should logically flow from the vision shared by the student affairs profession, but also reflected in the context of the mission of the institution.

"Personal Mastery" is the discipline by which individuals reflect deeply on personal values, attitudes, and assumptions. Individuals seek to realize organizational goals and objectives that are most closely aligned with their personal values (Senge, 2006). This discipline represents the spirit of the learning organization, since this discipline is driven by the individuals that comprise organizations. Personal mastery, as described by Senge, is the discipline of finding personal motivation and creativity not only in the workplace but in all aspects of life. Personal mastery is essentially personal life-long learning. It fits well within the context of higher education and student affairs. The student affairs profession seeks to help students develop the discipline of personal mastery through experiential and co-curricular opportunities.

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Thus, this developmental discipline is quite applicable and appropriate for a student affairs learning organization framework.

"Team Learning" is the discipline based primarily on the concepts of dialogue and discussions, which occur among communities of people who learn from the knowledge and experiences of themselves and others. Gilley and Maycuncich (2000) purport that team learning allows organizational members to learn more about themselves in the context of others, to deepen their own thoughts and ideas, to build capacity for reflection, as well as to improve communication and opportunities to collaborate.

"Surfacing Mental Models" is the discipline of reflecting upon, rethinking, and perhaps changing deeply held assumptions, values, and beliefs that prove to be faulty based on new knowledge gained through individual or organizational learning activities. Mental models are very useful in organizational activities as they allow for a common picture to be shared among the collective group.

Mental models provide a priori power to events and actions that occur. Senge (1990) suggests that the most critical mental models are those shared among the key decision makers, which could "limit an organization's range of actions to what is familiar and comfortable" (p. 186). In student affairs organizations, mental models have been both a barrier and enhancement to the work of improving student learning and engagement. In the profession's infancy stages, noted scholars regulated the field to the administration of services that were no longer desirable roles of the faculty in higher education institutions. These mental models relegated practitioners to the role of service providers. As the profession matured, these mental models were reframed as scholars began to better understand the role that co-curricular learning experiences had on the educational development of students. These opportunities illuminated how students can also

examine mental models in the context of activities that complimented the work occurring in the classroom. Today, while there is a more shared mental model of the role of student affairs, many people who work in student affairs organizations are not socialized into the profession through effective graduate preparation programs.

"Systems Thinking" is considered the fifth discipline that brings all of the disciplines together. It stems from extensive work in the literature on systems theory and allows organizational members to see the organization function from a broader perspective. This global perspective allows members to see how parts of an organization work together to produce results. Systems thinking is a critical skill in that it takes into account the complexity of organizations. Higher education and student affairs organizations are very complex. Thus, the power of systems thinking can provide a path toward organizational improvement.

Senge (1990) asserts that as organizational leaders and members master these disciplines, the more the organization will form into a learning organization. Unfortunately, the theoretical underpinnings of the disciplines are not sufficiently attended to in the contexts of organizational activities, processes and practices. More importantly, little research examines how the learning organization concept and the associated disciplines could impact student affairs organizations or even higher education. In fact, Love and Estanek (1994) purport that although higher education espouses learning as a foundation, "they themselves rarely exhibit the characteristics of a learning organization" (p. 51).

Senge (1990) does recognize that existing literature takes little account of the role of people suggesting that, "It appears that the preoccupation of existing research with learning at the organizational level is losing sight of the significance of people as the key to unlocking much of the mystery around learning (p. 217). While he contends that a challenge to building effective

learning organizations is the reality that human agency is a variable that can not be predicted (Senge, 1995), authors Kline and Saunders (1998) further lament that, "No business or other agency that does not respect and honor them (humans) can really, in the long run, remain successful" (p. #). Student affairs organizations are not exempt from these observations. The daily pressures from diverse stakeholders such as students, institutional leaders, parents, and the larger higher education community cause many student affairs divisions and practitioners to hastily react to the immediate issues and concerns of the day. Intentional opportunities for reflection and learning are designed for the students with whom practitioners interact, but rarely for the practitioners themselves. These critiques are not new, nor have they been ignored by the student affairs profession, practitioners, or divisional leaders seeking to improve their organizations. However, given the challenges facing student affairs in this knowledge-driven era, the learning organization concept, with its strengths, may prove useful in the development of a conceptual framework for improving student affairs organizations.

Other writers have commented on the learning organization. Caldwell (2005) asserts that the learning organization is currently the most useful model used among practitioners. Dever (1997) writes that, "The idea of a learning organization…is appropriate for institutions whose missions are devoted to primarily to educating students and advancing knowledge, not producing goods or providing services for profit" (p. 57). He further argues that unlike other quality improvement approaches, the learning organization is very compatible with the ethos of higher education. For example, using Senge's (1990, 2006) framework for the learning organization, Dever (1997) contends that unearthing mental models, which bring to the surface underlying values and assumptions, is a key learning goal for students in higher education. He also offers that Senge's idea of systems thinking, seeing the interrelationships and interconnectedness of

many parts, is also an essential goal in student learning (Dever, 1997). Thus, unlike the approaches mentioned in chapter one (i.e., academic program review, accreditation, assessment, and TQM), the learning organization should appeal to administrators and faculty—particularly those who find prescriptive, surface-level approaches to organizational improvement futile and seek to optimize student learning and development.

Many have attempted to prescribe how to develop a learning organization (Garvin, 2000; Finger & Brand, 1999; Kline & Saunders, 1998). Authors in the field have asserted that prescriptions for developing a learning organization have contributed to the under-utilization of theoretical underpinnings that can serve to sustain activities and processes related to a learning organization. However, it is important to attend to the needs of practitioners who seek immediate, actionable, and tangible strategies for organizational improvement. In later chapters of this dissertation, the researcher culls data from the study to highlight strategies that have been successful from those currently working in higher education and student affairs (Smith, 2001).

The learning organization concept, which emphasizes the human agency, knowledge, leadership, and culture, can be used to better understand and improve the quality of student affairs organizations. Understanding, improving, and sustaining a learning-orientated organization is the lynchpin in organizational improvement given the value of information and knowledge in today's society. This approach, coupled with existing frameworks used in student affairs can reposition student affairs organizations to rise to the calls for increased accountability for enhanced student learning and engagement.

Given the complimentary relationship between the concept of a learning organization and student affairs organizations, re-appropriating the learning organization concept to provide a theoretical foundation for organizational improvement in student affairs organizations is not only

appropriate, but also necessary. Dill (2001) asserts, "As a result, the learning organization literature is often eclectic, evaluating ideas and concepts according to their applicability rather than through theoretically rigorous and grounded research studies" (p. 129). But this contention is not without critique. For example, Smith (2001) asserts that the disciplines do not integrate the complexities of modern organizations and that little attention is given to the capacity of leaders to engage in the developmental paths represented by the disciplines. In addition, no mention is given to the role that organizational politics play in organizational improvement efforts. Smith (2001) further opines that there are a number of shortcomings to the model including its theoretical weakness and lack of any critical analysis of Senge's (1990) framework.

However, the learning organization concept is used in this dissertation to provide a conceptual archetype onto which a grounded theoretical foundation can be mapped, as many of the ideas, strategies, and practices concerning the learning organization concept are appropriate for student affairs organizations and higher education in general. Improving higher education from an organizational perspective could transform the higher education enterprise and all of those who participate within it.

Thus, student affairs and the learning organization concept serve as the platform onto which a grounded conceptual framework is developed to facilitate the dialogue on and practice in organizational quality improvement as well as to ground the ideas, strategies, and practices currently used in higher education and student affairs implemented in the name of organizational improvement.

Proffering a learning organization framework for student affairs organizations is relevant, timely, and addresses a void that exists in higher education management literature. The next chapter introduces the draft of a learning organization framework for student affairs

organizations. The framework is based on the analysis of the literature that was informed by both the student affairs discourse and the literature on the learning organization. The literature analysis is integrated throughout the presentation of the conceptual framework. Following the discussion of the framework, the methods for the study are presented as well as the results, conclusions, and implications for future research.

3.0   DRAFT OF STUDENT AFFAIRS LEARNING ORGANIZATION FRAMEWORK

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is designed to build and validate a conceptual framework that can assist student affairs divisions in improving organizational quality toward the ends of improving other outcomes—primarily student learning and development outcomes. Initial reflections about the most appropriate literatures evolved from two courses taken during the researcher's course of studies—*Quality Assurance in Higher Education* and *Organization Development and Leadership in Higher Education*—as well as a literature analysis on the student affairs profession, the concept of the learning organization, quality management, organizational culture, and leadership. The emergent constructs included organizational learning, knowledge management, communities of practice, and transformational leadership. The literature represents the interrelated discourses that informed the development of the learning organization framework.

The quality management literature provides a historical analysis of why higher education management is in a crisis. It also provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the four current approaches to quality management in higher education, which include academic program review, accreditation, outcomes assessment, and total quality management.

The literature on organizational culture is essential as it exemplifies humanistic aspects of organizational life as it is the deeply held values, assumptions and beliefs. Culture is humanistic

in that it embeds meaning, knowledge, and interpretations created by people in their daily practice and interactions with others, which drives organizational functioning. Culture can also assists researchers in understanding why and how social interactions take place. It also provides insight into individual and collective practices taking place. Leadership entails the visionary capacity to create and share new meanings and interpretations that can affirm the ability of organizations to improve.

Both leadership and culture have been concomitant variables in discussions on quality improvement and sustainability in higher education. Leadership and culture are examined in numerous ways with a substantive body of research examining these constructs as independent variables in relation to dependent variables such as innovation, effectiveness, employee satisfaction, productivity, as well as quality and change (Jaskyte, 2004). For example, Jaskyte (2004) and Schein (2002) assert that leaders can directly influence the organizational culture and vice versa. "Leaders can transmit and embed organizational culture through deliberate teaching, coaching, role modeling, reward, allocation, recruitment, selection, promotion, and other mechanisms" (p.154). The strength of organizational culture can also mediate the impact and influence of leadership who seek to engage in organizational efforts to improve.

The study of organizational culture and leadership are critical to the understanding of how student affairs organizations can improve. The role of organizational culture and leadership in quality initiatives is to provide a deeper, more meaningful approach to initiating organizational transformation. Surely content, organizational structures, and processes can and will help move organizations forward as discussed in current models quality management. However, without an understanding of the deeply held values, beliefs, and assumptions of the organizational member and their impact on practice, improvement efforts generally fail. Culture and leadership

constructs are less studied presumably because they are inextricably linked to human agency. Human agency is the capacity for human beings to make choices and to impose those choices on the world as a collective, irrespective of established processes, procedures and structures. Human agency is inherently difficult to generalize, predict, and normalize, making it a challenging concept to study. However, obtaining a cultural understanding of organizations by considering human agency will deepen any organizational analysis and provide alternative insights in organizational improvement.

The student affairs literature provides the context for why the learning organization framework is practical for these organizations in higher education. A key element in this literature is the divergent perspectives of student affairs work and the calls for re-examination and reform within the student affairs practice.

The learning organization concept has gained popularity in managerial literature as the organizational form most appropriate for the current knowledge economy (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Senge, 1990; Easterby-Smith et al., 1999; Preskill & Torres, 1999). The literature on the learning organization is critical to this study, as it serves as the foundation upon which the learning organization framework is built.

The analysis of the literature places the present research inquiry in context and opens the doors to humanistic research currently scant in organizational studies (Aktouf, 1992). Four constructs emerge from a cursory analysis. The constructs include organizational learning, knowledge management, transformational leadership, and communities of practice. The relationship among constructs provides a conceptual foundation for a learning organization within the context of student affairs organizations. Table 4 highlights the constructs and the literatures from which they emerged.

These constructs emerged for several reasons. First, each construct aligns with the assumptions of the humanistic perspective and the researcher's social constructivist orientation. Second, within current strategies to improve quality in higher education such as academic program review, accreditation, total quality management and outcomes assessment, these constructs are narrowly addressed. When they are addressed, they are tangential to the substantive components of these strategies and offer no real theoretical understanding of their role within that particular strategy. Third, each construct (communities of practice being the newest) exists within a particular discourse lending them to ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions shared by many within a scholarly community—mitigating an overly prescriptive use in practice. Fourth, the constructs share the ethos of the student affairs profession and are often alluded to in student affairs research. Finally, these constructs frequently overlap in the literature, suggesting their interrelatedness and appropriateness for further examination of their relationships. The following analysis provides definitions, basic principles, the rationale for each construct's inclusion in the framework, and how each construct contributes to improving student affairs organizations.

Table 4: Contributing Literatures and Their Rationale

Literature	Resulting Constructs	Rationale
Student Affairs	Transformational Leadership, Organizational Learning, Communities of Practice	The unit of analysis in which the conceptual framework is situated
Learning Organizations	Leadership, Organizational Learning, Knowledge Management, Communities of Practice	The foundation for the conceptual framework for student affairs
Quality Management	Organizational Learning	Overarching topic under investigation
Organizational Culture	Transformational Leadership	A mitigating determinant of organizational functioning

Organizational learning has a long history and substantive body of research dating back as far as the 1950s (March & Simon, 1958; Kezar, 2005). In fact, the concept of the learning organization builds upon the more extensive theoretical organizational learning literature (Dill, 2001). It is included in the learning organization framework because it addresses individual, group, and organizational learning processes. Learning is a key activity for college students and occurs when the meaning, interpretation, and sharing of knowledge is done by people in social interactions. It becomes organizational when the knowledge that is created is embedded in the culture of an organization and is then used in practices. This understanding aligns with both the humanistic and social constructivist assumptions of the researcher.

Knowledge management is the second construct included in the framework because it is a set of human and technical processes that captures the knowledge produced during organizational learning activities. It is a broad concept that has recently shifted to a more humanistic and social constructivist perspective.

Wenger (1991) coined the term "communities of practice" to describe groups that engage in the process of learning in some shared domain. Communities of practice are important in the student affairs learning organizational framework because learning is the central activity in these communities. Communities of practice are the third construct in the framework because they serve as fluid structures through which knowledge can be created, interpreted, shared, and applied. These communities also represent the spaces in which organizational activities can occur.

Transformational leadership is the last construct in this framework because multiple literatures suggest the importance of leadership in improving organizational quality. Unlike many constructs of leadership, transformational leadership suggests a humanistic focus on the part of leaders in the organization. Among key attributes, transformational leaders seek to incorporate the goals of organizational members into the vision of the organization. This type of leadership style creates and sustains a culture that could maximizes the human agency by integrating learning processes with work tasks and seeks to meet higher-level needs of organizational members.

3.2 ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Organizational learning is the first construct that emerged from the literature analysis, as it is inextricably linked to the learning organization concept and is a requisite for organizational sustainability and improvement is emphasized in the literature (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Lipshitz & Popper, 2004). Like the learning organization, organizational learning is conceptualized by numerous scholars and practitioners seeking to understand and improve organizations. Not only

is the construct discussed from diverse perspectives, but confusion stems from the terms' synonymous usage. To be sure, it is generally accepted that organizational learning represents a process, or a set of activities based on a robust discourse derived from both the academic and managerial literature, whereas the learning organization concept is an ideal organizational form.

Chiva and Alegre (2005) contend that there are two perspectives emanating from the discourse on organizational learning. One focuses on the cognitive aspects of organizational learning derived primarily from the field of psychology. The second perspective examines organizational learning and comes from a social perspective drawing from sociology and social learning theory.

Countless definitions of organizational learning abound in the literature, but they all suggest that organizations cannot learn independently of the learning that takes place among individuals (Berends et al., 2003). Organizational learning is not unique to learning organizations, but occurs in every organization (Easterby-Smith, 1997). Current research also emphasizes the role of the individual learning and suggests that organizations learn based on the learning of individuals. There is also consensus that since individuals comprise organizations, individual learning must occur; however, in a learning organization, organizational learning is not the sum total of all that is learned by individuals. Organizational learning becomes a metaphor to describe individual learning in the context of organizations (Chiva & Alegre, 2005).

Unfortunately, divergence on what organizational learning is and how it is achieved persists (Schwandt, 1995). As writers from many disciplines continue to enter the discourse from their perspectives, the construct becomes confusing and perhaps futile to those seeking to use it. This section outlines the basic ideas of organizational learning and highlights some of the arenas in which the construct has shown more promise for both theoretical understanding and

application. In the next section, the researcher outlines how the construct will be used in the learning organization framework and describes its alignment with the student affairs field—its ethos as well as its desired outcomes.

Table 5 outlines other prominent definitions of organizational learning outlined by Garvin (1994). Analysis of these definitions demonstrates how organizational learning is perceived from a cognitive perspective.

Table 5: Definitions of Organizational Learning

Definition	Author
The process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding.	Marlene Fiol and Marjorie A. Lyles, 1985
Changing the range of potential behavior.	George P. Huber, 1991
Organizations are seen as learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior.	Barbara Levitt and James G. March, 1998
The process of detecting and correcting error.	Chris Argyris, 1977
Sharing knowledge and insights	Ray Stata, 1989
A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights.	Garvin, 1994

Source: Garvin (1994)

From a social perspective, organizational learning is a constantly evolving process of information gathering, interpreting, and sharing of knowledge—all of which flows within and among communities of practice (Chiva & Alegre, 2005). Learning happens in social settings and through social interactions among organizational members. The social perspective is predicated on the idea that learning does occur individually, but organizational learning occurs in the context and culture of the social interactions practiced in organizations. Organizational learning is directed toward the achievement of common goals and purposes. Unlike in the cognitive perspective, organizational learning from a social perspective does not pose a conflict with

individual learning—both occur because the focus of organizational learning activities is toward the goal and betterment of the organization, which may or may not be the goal or the result of individual learning activities.

All organizations "learn;" however, it is building the capacity to learn effectively and intentionally engaging in learning-based activities that advance the shared vision, goals, and outcomes that separate learning organizations from traditional ones. While noted that this research assumes a social perspective on organizational learning, this assumption does not mitigate the need to understand how individual learning activities can enhance or hinder organizational learning activities. Again, the main thesis in this research is that organizational improvement must be examined from a humanistic perspective, so to ignore the work in individual learning theory would be neglectful. Thus, Kim's (1999) model for understanding the organizational learning construct is useful. The model includes understanding the different levels of learning, individual learning, and most importantly, understanding the transfer of learning from individuals to the organization.

Conceptual and operational learning are two distinct levels of learning that do not always occur in cogently linked space and time; however, some writers argue that learning must include both levels. Conceptual learning is the "know-why" and operational learning is the "know-how." Bringing these learning levels together creates a definition that considers learning as increasing one's capacity to take effective action (Kim, 1999). Kim (1999) purports that the experiential model of learning closely combines both learning levels definitions. This model suggests that individuals engage in an experience, reflect on the experience, and adjust their mental models to incorporate the learning that has occurred from the experience. Kolb's suggest that student affairs organizations engage in experiential learning (1984). Thus, Kim's model and

the incorporation of experiential-based learning is useful. Thus, organizational learning from a social perspective that incorporates both the operational and conceptual learning is well aligned with the field as well as the practice of many student affairs professionals.

The organizational learning literature further seeks to understand how individual learning enhances or hinders organizational learning as well as how organizational learning is sustained. Building the organization's capacity to respond to, adapt to, integrate, as well as generate internal and external change is facilitated fundamentally by individuals engaging in learning processes that allow them to skillfully interpret information, which allows them to reframe or create new knowledge, which Senge (1990, 2006) refers to as surfacing mental models. Within communities and interactions with other organizational members, these mental models are shared and then tested again against the knowledge and experiences of others, or through the learning occurring in the social interaction. Knowledge then moves beyond the individual and to the collective of the organization, which Kim (1999) suggests is organizational memory. This memory becomes embedded in organizational structures and processes.

Hong (1999) contends that while organizational learning is considered a tool for competitive advantage, it must be considered in the context of how the organizational culture can also facilitate or hinder opportunities for organizational learning. In his work, Hong stresses that effective organizational learning requires attention to organizational structures in place that would frame the organizational learning activities.

Organizational learning is a construct in the learning organization framework because it is the process through which organizational members develop shared meaning about work. Facilitating organizational learning can affect organizational improvement efforts if a culture of improvement emanates from shared assumptions and values among the organizational members.

Student affairs organizations will benefit from understanding and engaging the organizational learning concept and the potential it has to improve organizational life.

Unfortunately, Bauman (2005) writes, "Colleges and Universities have been highlighted as an example of a type of organization that does not engage in organizational learning effectively" (p. 23). However, if a prominent measure of quality in student affairs organizations includes student learning and development, members in the student activities office should look to build their learning capacity by working with other functional areas about strategies to enhance student learning and development. To prepare students for a knowledge economy, it is important for student affairs professionals in all functional areas to shift their thinking to view learning as the foundation of work and then model this thinking in daily practice for observation by students. For example, career services professionals can interact with leadership development educators to discuss ways of intentionally enhancing leadership competencies for students. In addition, these administrators can reflect on their work and engage in informal learning opportunities such as professional conferences, 'webinars,' e-courses, etc.

3.3   KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

This construct emerged through the researcher's analysis of quality management, organizational culture, as well as the learning organization literatures. Writers from all of these discourses discuss knowledge and knowledge management to varying extents. Like organizational learning and many of the concepts presented in this study, knowledge management has a plethora of meanings with which it is associated. It was once touted as only a reinvention of library science and information management (Ponzi, 2001; Milam, 2005).

In this study, knowledge management is the process of effectively storing, accessing, and diffusing information throughout the organization so that localized knowledge can become organizational knowledge—and become embedded into the organization's memory. This conception of knowledge management is different from library science or information management because it defines knowledge as a combination of information, experience, and judgment (Sunassee & Sewry, 2002). Knowledge starts as data, which include facts and numbers. Kidwell et al. (2000) write, "Information is data put into context… Only when information is combined with experience and judgment does it become knowledge" (p. 29). Information and library sciences focus on processes, tools, and technology effective for knowledge storage and retrieval (Milam, 2005). But Sunassee & Sewry (2002) contend that knowledge is, "Human expertise stored in a person's mind gained through experience, and interaction with the person's environment" (p. 235). They further suggest that economics, politics, as well as the organization's culture influence what becomes knowledge and how it is then managed in an organization. This conception of knowledge management represents a social constructivist approach.

Knowledge management, a necessary activity resulting from organizational learning, is pervasive in the quality improvement literature. It is included in the learning organization framework because knowledge is the outcome of what is produced through organizational learning activities, which occur in communities of practices and other types of organizational collectives types. It is designed to improve organizational practice, which currently lacks a conceptual foundation in higher education management literature and the literature in student affairs (Thorn, 2001, as cited in Milam, 2005).

3.4   COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of practice are important places of knowledge creation, interpretation, and diffusion. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) contend that, "they provide concrete organizational infrastructure for realizing the dream of a learning organization (p.6). Communities of practice are not knew or unique structures. However, in a knowledge-driven economy, it is imperative for organizations to intentionally and systematically incorporate these structures into the fabric of the organization, as "they knit the whole system together around core knowledge requirements" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 7). In addition to functional units, workgroups, teams, and other organizational types, these communities are groups of practitioners who care deeply about their work and seek to regularly improve their practice through learning experiences and opportunities to interact with other members of the community. Garvin (1993) contends that experience is a powerful knowledge builder that can not be passively developed. Communities of practice facilitate this development among participating members. They are essential knowledge and social structures needed for a knowledge-based economy (Wenger et. al, 2002).

The structure of communities of practice as defined by Wenger et al. (2002) provides structurally clear distinctions between them and other organizational types. The structural model includes three elements: domains, communities, and practices. Domains represent the topic of interest and the knowledge area to be studied within the community. Domains serve as indicators of the community's identity, around which members can deepen their commitment and participation.   Domains help members decide what information is useful, needed, and appropriate for sharing within the community. They are essential to communities of practice

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because they reflect the community's value and affirm the purpose of those who participate and those who may chose to participate later.

Communities are the second element in the structural model. Wenger et al. (2002) suggest that communities create the social fabric of learning. This contention aligns well with the social perspective of organizational learning. In this construct, communities are not computer databases, IT software, Web sites, or other artifacts that may evolve from a community. However, they are a collective group of individuals who care deeply about the domain and are committed to learning and utilizing new or reframed knowledge. This does not suggest that the members must be homogenous. The diversity of community members allows for exponential knowledge growth and diffusion of knowledge. In addition, the success of the community comes from the participant's self-selection or assignment based on the participant's interests (Wenger et. al, 2002).

Practice is the third element in the structural model. It "denotes a set of socially defined ways of doing things in a specific domain: a set of common approaches and shared standards that create a basis for action, communication, and problem solving" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 38). Collective practice informs the work of individuals and also reflects the practitioners' interest.

There is a political dimension of communities of practice where shared practices are agreed upon, discarded, revised, updated, etc (Wenger et. al., 2002). Thus, within the community, it is important that the larger domain of interest remains at the forefront of the community's activities and that leadership is distributed throughout the structure. This represents a key difference in communities of practice versus other types of organizational structures such as teams, workgroups, departments, units, etc where decisions often rest with one or a few individuals.

The structural model articulated by Wenger et al. (2002) is not only useful for understanding what a community of practice is, it also helps guide the facilitation and support of them within organizations by providing three areas toward which efforts can be focused—the domain, the community, and the practice.

Communities of practice are not necessarily based on traditional functional areas. In fact, they are often based on participants' interests and need to solve or explore particular work issues. These communities can exist within functional areas, across functional areas, or even across organizational boundaries (Wenger et al., 2002). This construct is appropriate for improving organizational quality as many practitioners in the student affairs field work in communities of practice that are both within their functional areas and outside of those professional boundaries.

Blimling (2001) identifies four student affairs communities of practice. The researcher introduces an additional one. They provide a good example for understanding the utility of the communities of practice construct, but also some pitfalls of their use.

Blimling (2001) contends that the communities of practice in the student affairs profession yield differing theories, assumptions, and practices, which, if not understood, lead to professional identity confusion and misaligned practices (a suggested challenge of the student affairs profession). Understanding and participating in these communities can help student affairs practitioners develop a professional identity and better address the many reports calling for student affairs accountability, reform, and improvement (Blimling, 2001). The communities of practice purported by Blimling included: student administration, student services, student development, and student learning. The researcher offers a fifth community, which is the student affairs research and assessment community of practice.

The student affairs administration community of practice is comprised of professionals who adhere to a philosophy of the administration of resources for the benefit of students. Unfortunately, many stakeholders and purveyors external to student affairs view this practice as the only role of student affairs organizations (Blimling, 2001). The student services community of practice is similar to the student administration community because the focus tends to be on student management. This community of practice is based on the philosophy of student as consumers. Many business strategies such as TQM were imported to improve student satisfaction (Blimling, 2001). The goal of this community is to improve services that will keep students satisfied.

The third community of practice focuses on the domain of student development. Earlier, the researcher suggested that student affairs is an appropriate unit of analysis because of its humanistic disposition. This community of practice emerged from the humanistic movement in psychology. Student affairs scholars posited that practitioners should be experts in both cognitive and psychosocial development. Student affairs professionals in this community see the role of student affairs professionals as educators who equally contribute to the development of students, as do faculty in the classroom (Blimling, 2001). Those within this community of practice develop programs, opportunities, and experiences that are designed to address developmental needs of students at various points in the collegiate experience (Blimling, 2001).

The student learning community of practice broadens the student development domain and seeks to engage students in all aspects of learning (Blimling, 2001). This community not only supports, but also partners with faculty to design opportunities and experiences that compliment the academic activities in the classroom. Members in this community focus on

developing competencies that will allow students to engage in life-long learning. The are seen as partners who work with faculty (Blimling, 2001).

The researcher offers a fifth community of practice, which includes those interested in student affairs research and assessment. This community comprises professionals who care about advancing scholarly research in the field and determining if the work in student affairs achieves desirable goals and outcomes. These practitioners also seek to disseminate information to help frontline professionals in their direct work with students. Members of this community are prominent presenters, lectures, and trainers at national association conferences, and also serve as consultants to institutions.

The learning organization framework includes communities of practice because they serve as dynamic spaces through which knowledge can be developed, interpreted, shared, and applied. Social constructivism grounds the concept such that learning is viewed as a social process. Communities of practice are humanistic in that learning is the primary activity and the focus is on the social interactions and practices among people within them. Practice does not only improve from individual activities, but from social interactions and activities among practitioners of the community.

Student affairs professionals can, and often do belong to more than one community and more than those described above. What makes communities of practice useful in the framework is that the learning taking place matters deeply to the people in the community. As suggested earlier, the student affairs profession is one where practitioners are often deeply committed to their work with college students—some have called it a "calling." Thus, the intentional and systematic facilitation and support of these spaces for learning and practice can enhance the quality of student affairs organization.

3.5   TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transformational leadership is a framework construct gleaned from all of the streams of literature, but particularly from the literature on organizational culture. Leadership is intrinsically linked to organizational culture because both can facilitate or hinder quality improvement efforts (Schein, 1992). Effective leadership has been cited as a necessary element for quality improvement and must use organizational culture as the portal for changing the way in which organizations function. Phfeffer (1978) contends that the concept of leadership is challenging for two main reasons including the ambiguity of the term, as well as the many constructs used to explain the phenomena, a common critique within the literature of all of the constructs. Additionally, a lack of consensus exists concerning the extent to which leadership can directly impact organizational improvement. This contention is still prevalent today. Regardless of these challenges, "There is a call for transformational change in higher education" (Mavrinac, 2005, p. 391). Transformational leadership may be the type of leadership requisite for improving organizational quality (Hickman, 1997).

Transformational leadership theory was first introduced by Burns in 1978 in a political science context and moved to the organizational literature in 1985 (Elkins & Keller, 2003). It provides a useful underpinning for understanding the role of leadership in quality improvement efforts. Transformational leadership creates and sustains a culture that maximizes the human agency by integrating learning processes and seeking to meet higher-level needs of organizational members (Hickman, 1997). In Burn's (1978) conception of transformational leadership, four dimensions exist. Charisma is the ability of a leader to influence others through exemplification of personal values that are also held deeply and widely among organizational members. Charisma suggests that a person can model behavior associated with those values

(Bass, 1990). Motivation is the second dimension of transformational leadership and suggests that a leader has a message that is inspirational and moves beyond the immediate goals of the organization and reaches personal goals of organizational members. Intellectual stimulation is the dimension that suggests leaders can challenge mental models, unearth deeply held assumptions and invigorate processes of critical reflection, decision making, participation, etc. (Bass, 1990). The last dimension is individualized attention and consideration. Here, the leader seeks to develop organizational members' personal and professional capacities. Leaders are viewed as mentors and coaches. They believe that organizational members are the keys to successful organizations and will tap into their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Bass, 1990). Hickman (1997) builds on Bass's earlier conceptions suggesting that while the focus has been on leaders and followers, a more enhanced perspective concerns leadership not only with members in the organization, but also with society. Hickman's "Transformistic Organizations" framework describes leadership that has the capacity to change individuals, organizations, and the greater society so that all three levels can adapt to a changing environment (1997, p. 1).

Transformational leadership develops a culture of quality, defined by the researcher as a culture of learning, and provides opportunities for learning to occur. Mavrinac (2005) suggests that, "the concept of a learning culture has been criticized for its utopian claims, vague definition and lack of empirical evidence about how learning is transferred from the individual to the organization, how organizations learn, and the degree to which organizational performance is improved" (p. 392). While the literature analysis conducted for this dissertation addresses this claim, the researcher does support Marvrinac's assertion that the process of learning is itself transformational and that in order to improve, learning must occur.

Chaffee and Tierney (1988) purport that one of the most critical aspects of leadership entails nurturing the culture as well as understanding discrepancies in perceptions, which are socially constructed. Schein (1992) contends that leadership should uncover mental models and determine how they are manifested in values, artifacts, and symbols. Leadership should also be prepared "to deal with the anxiety unleashed when these levels of culture are challenged" (p. 27). Schein (1990) also suggests that in order for a leader to exude charisma, he must be acutely aware of the various levels of the organizational culture. This can include elements such as artifacts, ceremonies, rituals, language, symbols, etc., all of which influence organizational behavior and practice as well as subsequent outcomes.

To be sure, leadership and culture are inextricably linked in any discussion about organizational quality improvement. The transformational leadership construct is included in the conceptual framework because it is aligned with the researcher's natural proclivity toward human agency and social constructivism and with the overarching philosophy of student affairs and higher education. As with transformational leadership, student affairs professionals seek to build the capacity of students to lead meaningful and productive lives so that they may transform the places in which they live and work.

3.6 DRAFT OF THE STUDENT AFFAIRS LEARNING ORGANIZATION FRAMEWORK

The learning organization, as articulated by Senge and others, is effective at organizational learning (Tsang, 1997). Organizational learning occurs when student affairs professionals, in social interactions and social environments—such as the five communities of practice—create,

interpret, share, and apply knowledge that can affect organizational behavior and practice. Knowledge is the combination of judgment and experience developed by people based on incoming data and information (Sunassee and Sewry, 2002). Knowledge is embedded in organizational culture and memory by members testing and sharing mental models to develop models that are shared and aligned with the organization's shared vision. The mobility of individuals into different communities of practice support increased opportunities for learning (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Communities of practice manage the knowledge that is derived from the learning culture (Snell, 2001) that has been developed and supported by transformational leadership in the organization. Transformative leadership shapes the organizational culture requisite for learning and plays a critical role in the learning organization. Leadership is distributed across all levels of the organization and facilitates learning within and among the communities of practice and also attends to the organization's culture. Table 6 provides propositions of how the learning organization framework is useful for student affairs.

Table 6: Propositions of the Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework- Draft

1. Student affairs organizations are, to the greatest extent, humanistic in their approach to student learning and development. The learning organization concept aligns with the ethos of the student affairs profession.

2. Student affairs divisions do not always function in institutions where learning is the primary activity for not only students, but also organizational members. However, student affairs divisions should transform into learning cultures and serve as models and facilitators of adult and life-long learning. It is the philosophy of the student affairs practice. Additionally, the calls for outcomes assessment, accountability, improved quality, etc. provide the external force for change. The concept of the Learning Organization posits a learning culture as a requisite for organizational improvement.

3. Since student affairs organizations represent an interdisciplinary set of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that can contribute to enhanced student learning and engagement, organizational learning strategies and knowledge management systems should be enhanced to improve these competencies for student affairs professionals. Both constructs impact an organization's capacity to create, re-appropriate, disseminate, and diffuse knowledge. Student affairs organizations are not immune to the myriad of criticisms aimed at uncovering the value, the cost, and the contribution of higher education to individuals, organizations, and the greater society. Stakeholders want knowledge to inform the decision. Student affairs must adapt to the competitive drivers of knowledge management and also the internal benefit derived from organizational learning. Managing the knowledge created or incorporated through organizational learning activities improves the organization's ability to adapt in a knowledge-driven environment.

4. Communities of practice are the places where organizational learning activities occur. Members of the communities share a commitment to a knowledge domain and have created a culture that represents the values of their interests. Their work is informed by the knowledge created and shared among a collective. Five communities of practices seem to permeate student affairs organizations and should be recognized by those attempting to create learning organizations. Cultures of communities of practice are the gatekeepers to improving quality.

5. Transformational leadership represents leadership that values the intrinsic worth of those within the organizations. Leadership is distributed throughout the organization because and members participate in decision making. Organizational members see their values and beliefs present in the vision of the organization. Leadership is charismatic, inspirational, and stimulates organizational members in ways that facilitate their pursuit of professional and personal development. The culture of the student affairs profession lends itself well to the transformational leadership construct.

These propositions represent an organizational improvement framework applied to student affairs organizations. This study does not intend to describe the plethora of disciplines,

practices, and strategies that can be used to develop the learning organizations—this literature abounds. It does however attempt to provide a conceptual foundation of how and why a humanistic approach to organizational quality improvement can ground activities taking place. This knowledge can inform student affairs organizations and support further exploration and examination of the potential of the learning organization concept. A draft of the student affairs learning organization framework illustrated in Figure 2 provides a visual examination of the constructs and their relationships among each other. The initial framework was represented by a circle to depict the continuous and ongoing nature of the learning organization. Within the larger circle, the shaded area represents with the culture of the organization and is labeled as learning culture because the researcher suggests that to improve organizational outcomes, learning must be a core value. The inner circles represent the communities of practice articulated by Blimling (2001). Within and among communities of practice, organizational learning activities take place as well as processes and systems to designed to capture the knowledge created, shared and disseminated. Transformational leadership represents the axis or centeredness required for creating and sustaining a learning organization

Since this dissertation seeks to develop and validate a conceptual framework for organizational improvement in student affairs organizations, Chapter 4 outlines the research methods used to validate the conceptual framework introduced. Chapter 5 presents the results from the study and the revised framework, and Chapter 6 provides the conclusion, implications, and areas of further research derived from the study.

Student Affairs Learning Organization

Organizational Learning
Student Services
Community of Practice
Knowledge Management

Learning Culture

Learning Culture

Knowledge Management Systems
Organizational Learning

Knowledge Management Systems
Organizational Learning

Organizational Learning
Student Learning/
Student Development
Community of Practice
Knowledge Management

Transformational Leadership

Organizational Learning
Student Administration
Community of Practice
Knowledge Management

Organizational Learning
Knowledge Management Systems

Organizational Learning
Knowledge Management Systems

Learning Culture

Organizational Learning
Student Affairs Assessment
And Research
Community of Practice
Knowledge Management

Learning Culture

Figure 2: Draft of the Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework

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4.0   CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This study proffers a conceptual framework that can be used to further understand and improve higher education institutions—specifically student affairs organizations. To this point, the researcher has introduced the study, the context and the significance for the research, the rationale for the setting, the epistemological assumptions guiding the work, as well as the initial draft of the conceptual framework.

This chapter outlines the methods used to answer the overarching research question: **How can student affairs divisions improve to address current challenges and the challenges of 21st-century organizations?** To explore and articulate plausible answers to this overarching question, the related sub- questions are as follows:

1. What are the challenges facing student affairs organizations?

2. What is quality in the context of student affairs organizations?

3. What would be an innovative conceptual framework to understand and improve student affairs organizations:

    a. What would be the constructs in the framework?

    b. What relationships exist among the constructs?

4. To what extent can a learning organization framework facilitate organizational improvement in student affairs? What are the implications of the framework for student affairs practice?

Table 7 summarizes the research questions, data sources, and data analysis procedures.

Table 7: Research Questions, Data Sources, Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source	Data Collection Activity	Data Analysis Procedure
RQ1: What are the challenges facing student affairs organizations?	• Relevant Literature • Study Participants	• Reflection • Literature Reviews	• Data Coding • Constant Comparison
RQ2: What is quality in the context of student affairs organizations?	• Student Affairs Foundational Documents • Researcher Reflection • Relevant Literature • Delphi Study Participants	• Reflection Memos • Literature Reviews • Interviews	• Literature Analysis • Constant Comparison • Questioning • Data Coding
RQ3: What would be an innovative conceptual framework to understand and improve student affairs organizations: • What would be the constructs in the framework? • What relationships exist among the constructs?	• Cross-Disciplinary Literature • Delphi Study Participants	• Literature Review • Interviews	• Literature Analysis • Constant Comparison • Questioning • Data Coding
RQ4: To what extent can a learning organization framework facilitate organizational improvement in student affairs? What are the implications of the framework in student affairs practice?	• Delphi Study Participants • Researcher • Student Affairs Organizations	• Interviews • Reflection Memos • Student Affairs Document Retrieval	• Constant Comparison • Questioning • Data Coding

4.2   OVERALL RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research design is best suited for this inquiry, as this genre is appropriate for exploratory studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a deep understanding of organizational improvement and can also assist in the development of organizational theories (Spector, 2005). Qualitative research comprises a number of interpretative methods in which the researcher fully engages with the study participants (Muchinsky, 2003). These methods are applicable for studying organizational setting and include interviews, observations, focus groups, and other techniques (e.g., Landy & Conte, 2004; McBride & Schostak, 2004; Spector, 2005). In addition, they can uncover underlying assumptions and values that guide behavior of organizational members (Ehigie & Ehigie, 2005). Examining organizational behavior can better inform scholars and practitioners about opportunities and barriers to organizational improvement. While a qualitative research genre underpins this study, elements of grounded theory methodology and a modified Delphi method are the tools and procedures used for data collection and analysis.

4.2.1   Grounded Theory Methods

Grounded theory methodology is a "way of thinking about conceptualizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 275). While it is a systematic set of procedures, it allows researchers flexibility and creativity in how the procedures are implemented. Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that within grounded theory methodology "concepts are formulated and analytically developed, conceptual relationships are posited…inclusive of multiple perspectives of the actors" (p. 280). Their seminal work supports the researcher's contention that developing a

conceptual framework that bridges theory and practice as well as assists in one's understanding and capacity to improve organizational quality must involve an audience interested in the topic, but also those required to engage in organizational improvement activities.

In addition, grounded theory methods can enhance a theory's "Practicality," which suggests a theory's ability to serve as a lens to view multiple possible outcomes (Prange, 1999). A framework's practicality suggests alternative views, possible courses of action, and plausible relationships among various constructs. Thus, a framework's practicality lies in its ability to suggest various outcomes which may be considered when applied in practice. This assertion is exactly aligned with the researcher's contention that there is a paucity of research that aims at conceptual understanding and even less research that demonstrates the relationships between theory and practice. Strauss and Corbin (1998) write, "Certainly, this does not mean that every grounded theory must have immediate or direct application…[However]these commitments [to grounded theory methods] carry responsibilities to develop or use theory that will have a least some practical applications" (p. 281). These methods permit this study to uncover the practicality of a learning organization conceptual framework and address the last, summative research question.

This research takes a slightly different approach to the original application of grounded theory methods, but utilizes to the tools provided for data collection and the processes described for data analysis. For example, the researcher draws upon existing cross-disciplinary literature (discouraged by the earlier writings on the methods) to become sensitive to the nuances that may emerge during the data collection process (now a key feature of the methodology). Grounded theory methodology suggests that the researcher must be "theoretically sensitive" and posits four strategies designed to achieve this sensitivity. The strategies include:

- Questioning the data;

- Analyzing multiple constructions of meanings and assumptions;

- Making novel comparisons to promote alternative understandings; and

- Probing absolutions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Thus, the interdisciplinary literature analysis was used not only to develop the initial draft of the framework, but to also enhance the researcher's sensitivity, which enabled the appropriate follow-up questions within the study, a knowledgeable identification and analysis of common themes, and the analysis of subtle nuances in the data that emerged during the data collection process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) purported that it is important to illustrate how the data collected compares to the existing scholarship. Thus, the cross-disciplinary literature analysis was used a comparative source. Strauss and Corbin (1994) caution researchers in using existing literature, as it may hinder a researcher's creativity. To mitigate this concern, the researcher drew upon formal experiences and reflection to illuminate bias and predisposition that may hinder analysis. Both activities (conducting a literature analysis and drawing on formal experiences) contributed to the development of the initial draft of the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3.

4.2.2 Delphi Method

The Delphi method is an iterative multistage technique, created by the Rand Cooperation in the 1950s for use in technological forecasting (Hasson, Keeney, & Mckenna, 2000). It has been used in both health sciences and social sciences fields (Hasson, Keeney, & Mckenna, 2000). It is a group-decision method requiring a panel of experts selected based on a topic of interest (Joppe, 2004). The method assumes that those with expertise can contribute better to a

deeper understanding of the topic under study as well as form group judgments. In a traditional Delphi process, participants respond to a questionnaire, which is analyzed to determine areas where the responses converge. The results are shared with the panelists, who engage in subsequent rounds of responding to questionnaires. This process is repeated several times, further decreasing the range of responses. The goal of the process is to develop a consensus regarding the issue under investigation. Okoli and Pawlowski (2004) note that a two-round process is a second application of the Delphi method when the goal is to develop concepts or frameworks.

There are several research objectives that can be accomplished using the Delphi technique including:

1. To understand underlying assumptions or information leading to differing judgments;

2. To seek out information which may generate consensus on the part of the respondent group;

3. To correlate informed judgments on a topic spanning a wide range of disciplines; and

4. To educate the respondent group as to the diverse and interrelated aspects of the topic. (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000).

There are three steps associated with Delphi Method. First, the research instrument must be developed. In this study, the researcher uses a semi-structured interview protocol encouraging the participants to comment and critique aspects of the conceptual framework. The protocol consists of questions regarding the panelists' perceptions and understanding of the challenges in higher education and student affairs; the major constructs of the framework; the proposed

relationship among the constructs; and the framework's practicality for improving quality in student affairs organizations. The interview protocol reflected the criteria for theory development proposed by Whetten (1989). The criteria included the following:

- A description of the constructs or variables of the phenomenon;

- The relationship between the constructs;

- The underlying assumptions about human behavior; and

- The limitations of the framework.

The semi-structured interview protocol is located in appendix E of this document.

The second step is to identify the participants who will be involved with the process. This study used a purposive sampling of approximately 14 participants. Participants were selected based on the review of their contribution to the scholarship of organizational studies (organizational improvement), higher education, and/or student affairs. Participants were those interested in the topic as determined by their willingness to participate, but those who also felt that they could provide substantive and constructive feedback on the conceptual framework developed by the researcher.

4.2.3   Participant Selection Procedure

The researcher used a systematic process for selecting the Delphi participants. First, the researcher created a Knowledge Resource Network worksheet (Okali & Pawlowski, 2004) to use as a guide for identifying potential Delphi participants. Since the conceptual framework is based on theoretical constructs, the researcher also sought to validate the framework with practitioners who would translate the theory into practice. Senior-level student affairs officers were selected since they are seasoned practitioners who lead student affairs organizations and would

presumably lead organizational improvement efforts. Scholars from higher education and student affairs were selected because of their work in developing new knowledge and educating future practitioners in the field. The worksheet identified the academic- and practitioner-related disciplines from which the participants emerged. Based on extensive analysis of potential participants' backgrounds, those with academic and/or practitioner backgrounds in education, student development, higher education, program evaluation and assessment, student affairs, and quality improvement were considered. The researcher solicited recommendations from members of professional associations such the National Association of Personnel Administrators (NASPA), as well as professional contacts the researcher has in the field. The researcher also solicited recommendations from the pilot study participants.

Prior to the full implementation of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot study using the same procedure described above. The pilot study was instrumental because it provided not only face validity of the conceptual framework and the semi-structured interview protocol, but also allowed the research to practice in-depth interviewing and data analysis techniques, which were required for the formal study. Four higher education scholars and practitioners were selected. Results yielded revisions to the conceptual framework and the semi-structured interview protocol. Notably, the researcher was advised to deepen the description of two constructs (communities of practice and knowledge management) as well as reconsider the transformational leadership construct. Since only one of the four participants suggested reformulating the leadership construct, the researcher maintained the transformational leadership construct in the draft conceptual framework. There were minimal suggested revisions to the interview protocol. However, after reflecting on the manner in which participants responded and how the questions led to particular discussions that were similar across the interviews, the

researcher re-ordered some of the questions, changed the wording of questions, and enhanced the format of the instrument (See Appendix C for the full results of the pilot study, Appendix B for the initial framework and interview protocol, and Appendix D for the revised materials based on the pilot study).

After revising the framework, approximately 35 scholars and senior student affairs officers were recruited to participate. Of these, 14 participated in the first round of interviews (40% of those solicited) and 11 (31% of those solicited) participated in the second round (three scholars are unable to participate in the second round of interviews). Table 8 provides a demographic breakdown of the participants based on role their (scholar or practitioner), years in the field and research interests.

Table 8: Demographics of Delphi Participants

Participant	Scholar or Practitioner	Years in the field	Research Interests
Kathy Humphrey-University of Pittsburgh, Vice Provost and Dean of Students	Practitioner	25	Student Spirituality Development, African American Student Retention
Dennis Pruitt-University of South Carolina, Vice President for Student Affairs, Vice Provost for Academic Support, and Dean of Students	Practitioner	30+	Higher education organization development
Trudy Banta-Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis[⊥] , Vice Chancellor for Planning and Institutional Improvement, and Professor of Higher Education	Scholar/ Practitioner	30	Assessment, Higher Ed Quality, Accreditation
Kathleen Manning- Vermont University, Associate Professor	Scholar	20+	Organizational Theory, Qualitative research Methodology and Cultural Pluralism.
John Schuh*- Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa of educational leadership at and Interim Director of the Research Institute for Studies in Education	Scholar	37	Organization and Administration in Higher Ed.
Dennis Roberts-Miami University of Ohio, Associate Vice-President of Student Affairs	Scholar/Practitioner	34	Student Affairs History, Leadership, Community Development
Linda Deanna- University of Illinois-Chicago, Assoc. Vice Chancellor/Dean of Students	Practitioner	15+	
Julie Wong- University of Texas at El Paso, Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students	Practitioner	18	Multiculturalism, Diversity, Equity and Access
Adrianna Kezar- University of Southern California, Associate Professor for Higher Education	Scholar	20+	Higher Education Improvement
Kim Yousey-New York University, Director of	Practitioner	10+	Evaluation and Assessment
Marilee Bresciani-* Leadership at San Diego State University, Associate Professor of Postsecondary Education	Scholar	20+	Outcomes-Based Assessment
James Anderson-University at Albany,Vice Provost for Student Success	Practitioner	25+	Learning Styles, Assessment Diversity
Larry Roper-Oregon State University, Vice Provost for Student Affairs	Practitioner	31	Community Building
**-Michigan State University	Scholar		

* Participants only able to participate in the first round of interviews.

** Participant wished to remain anonymous

Appendix A provides a brief background of each Delphi participant.

The third step is implementation of the method. The Delphi method for this study consisted of two rounds of data collection from the participants. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Each round entailed participants reflecting and responding to the questions on the interview protocol. After the first round of data collection and analysis, a summary of the responses as well as a refined framework were sent to the participants. The research engaged the participants in a second interview to both member-check the data from the first round, and to gain additional comments and feedback on the framework based on the consensus developed from the first round. The researcher and participants engaged in lengthy discussions. The questions on the protocol sparked further ideas and follow-up questions. When appropriate, the researcher used the follow-up questions with other participants when there were shared critiques or responses, or when the participants shared similar topics of interests. The researcher collected the data over a period of three months, reflected on the data, and developed new insights and knowledge that were maintained in researcher memos. The researcher used reflective memos and the themes elucidated from the transcripts to compare them with the data in literature analysis. For systematic data analysis, data was stored and accessed through N6, further described in the next section. Figure 3 provides a visual depiction of the Delphi method. Beginning on the left, the researcher will use professional experience and an extensive literature to cultivate the research questions. Following the review and analysis, the researcher then developed the instrumentation used with study participants who were selected based on the expert knowledge of the subject areas. The implementation of the technique follows with a two-round process in which the researcher iteratively collects and analyzes data, asks follow-up questions based on theoretical coding and sampling and finally revises the framework.

The Delphi Technique

Stages	Implementation		
	Round One		Round Two

Develop Instrument → Open-ended questionnaire

Collect Data ↔ **Develop/revise framework**

Select Participants → Student Affairs scholars and practitioners (10-15)

Analyze Data ↔ **Revise Interview protocol**

Implement Technique → Conduct Interviews

Thank participants for contribution

Theoretical Sampling and Comparative Analysis

Figure 3: Overview of the Delphi Method

The Delphi method is appropriate for this study because it facilitates knowledge development between the researcher and the Delphi participants. To achieve the goal of this study, the Delphi is particularly useful for three reasons, which also align with the objectives of the Delphi method as articulated by Hasson, Keeney, and Mckenna, (2000). First, the conceptual framework is based on interdisciplinary research. Second, the research process is recursive (meaning it can and should be repeated), as it is based on the construction of knowledge, meaning, and interpretation upon which the participant and researcher continued to build. Finally, the overall research design provides an opportunity to construct knowledge and meaning

on a topic comprised of interrelated aspects (Hasson et al., 2000). Figure 4 provides a visual diagram of the recursive nature of the research process. The triangle represents the sources of data which include the experts, the researcher's background and professional experiences, as well as the literature. Among these sources, there is the recursive nature of collecting and analyzing data that then flows back and forth as the conceptual framework is developed, revised, and validated.
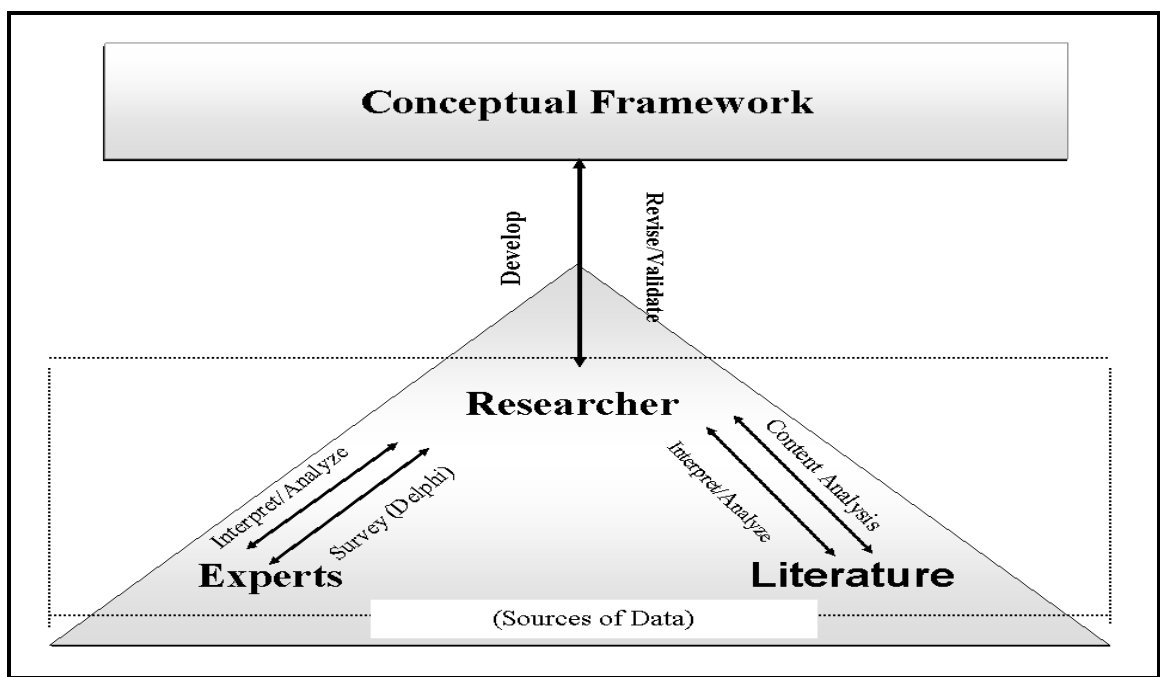
Figure 4: Research Process

4.3   DATA ANALYSIS

The amount of data to be collected warranted the use of a computer software application, which was designed to assist with the management of extensive and diverse types of data. Given the current research on computer assisted research packages, the researcher found N6 to be most appropriate for analysis. N6 is software for qualitative data analysis that assists with systematic coding of multiple forms of data (QSR International, 2002).

There are three basic tools in N6 that facilitated the data analysis including coders, text searches, and node searches. These tools allowed easy importing of the interview transcripts and assisted with the coding of the data. It also allowed the researcher to insert memos associated with analyzed text and systematically searched for themes in the data.

Coding of text allowed the researcher to find themes that were consistent throughout the data. Researchers should "look for processes, actions, assumptions, and consequences" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 274). Once the themes were identified and categorized, the researcher ensured that the themes represent interrelationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Memoing assisted the researcher in recording the relationships that emerged among the themes. While there are three ways memos can be classified, in this study, the researcher uses memos as code notes to explain the relationships among the themes, and as theory notes—used primarily as the researcher's reflections.

This software allowed the researcher to focus intensive time on searching for meaning, interpretations, and relationships within the framework and less time on the administrative tasks of handling the paper coding of extensive amounts of qualitative data.

There were approximately 23 documents totaling approximately 40 hours of interview data. Once the transcripts are uploaded to N6, the researcher was able to search and categorize

themes, concepts, and ideas (nodes) constructed from the coded data and then searched for themes as the process unfolded. The initial node structure was developed based on the literature analysis and includes nodes such as leadership, organizational culture, human agency, challenges for student affairs organizations, current approaches to quality management, learning organizations, as well as the four constructs derived from the literature analysis. Node tree development provided a visual mapping of the concepts emerging from the research and their relationship to other concepts. This initial node tree development served as starting point for further refining as the research process unfolded, specifically during the second round of the modified Delphi method when the participants were more comfortable with the researcher.

While N6 is the tool used to assist with analyzing the data, "Constant comparison," a term coined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was a data analysis technique used in the study. The researcher coded the data using the tools of the software, but searched for themes that emerged from the literature and the semi-structured interviews in relation to the research goal and the associated research questions. The similarities and comparisons were documented in researcher memos and were also used as sources of data. The technique of comparing data throughout the data collection process reinforced the iterative process necessary for real understanding of the data and for providing additional confidence that the resulted were grounded in research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This technique provided confidence that a complete, yet socially constructed picture of organizational improvement in student affairs organizations developed.

4.4   TESTS FOR VALIDITY

Introduced under the data collection section, a pilot test was designed to assess the face validity of the conceptual framework and the semi-structured interview protocol. While face validity is often considered the weakest of construct validity, its use strengthens the systematic process of testing the framework with experts. In addition, Okali and Pawlowski (2004) make the following assertion:

> A Delphi study can contribute to construct validity. Construct validity relies on a clear definition of the construct. Delphi study designs… ask participants to validate their initial responses to make sure that that the researchers understand the meanings of the list items submitted could contribute towards this goal. In addition, the framing of construct definitions in alignment with definitions in common use by practitioners also contributes towards consistency in the understandings of the construct by participants in future studies as well as understandability by practitioners of the resulting theory. (p. 27)

The researcher ensured that the research topic, questions, and research design are tightly coupled and complimentary within a logic model (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olsen, & Spiers, 2002). Verification strategies were also employed based on the work of Morse et al. (2002), and they contend, "In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of the study" (p. 9). They further proffered four research considerations useful in ensuring reliability and validity in qualitative research. Table 9 briefly describes the verification strategies offered by Morse et al. and how they were employed in this research study.

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Table 9: Verification Strategies

Research Considerations	Description	Application in this study
Methodological Coherence	Determining the extent to which the method matches the research questions and analytic techniques	The research questions sought to elicit understanding of the meanings and perceptions of organizational improvement as interpreted in the literature and among study participants.
Appropriate Sampling	Ensuring participants represent knowledge in the field of the study	Experts on the topic of quality management and student affairs were solicited to participate through a systematic selection process. The researcher's formal education and background also contributed to the valid construction of the framework.
Concurrent Data Collection and Analysis	Constantly comparing and checking data with findings as the core of reliability and validity testing	An iterative literature analysis occurred throughout the study as well as member checking. The researcher conducted these activities in the context of the research questions, the intent of the study, and researcher's epistemological assumptions.
Thinking Critically	Incrementally building of theory based on solid data that is checked and rechecked	Throughout the data collection process, the researcher tested ideas about the framework and recorded them as memos during the research process.
Theory Development	Recursively interacting with micro and macro perspectives so that theory is an outcome of the research process and template for further theory development	The conceptual framework is a set of concepts and proposed relationships developed as the research process unfolded. Further testing of the framework should continue to advance the dialogue on organizational improvement in higher education and student affairs organizations.

Thus, the overall research design as well as the data collection and analysis procedures are well aligned with the goals of the research, the topic under investigation, the researcher's research orientation, and the epistemological assumptions of the researcher. These verification strategies contribute to the reliability and validity of the research findings and are widely used in throughout qualitative research literature. The next chapter presents the results of the study.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter reports the analysis and results of the research study, which sought to validate the researcher's conceptual framework presented in Chapter 3. An expert panel of higher education scholars and practitioners were interviewed to critique the framework and offer insights into how it should be revised. These critiques flowed from the structure of interview protocol (designed around the research questions), the constructs of framework, (their descriptions, their appropriateness, and the relationship among them), and the overall practicality of the framework for improving student affairs organizations and higher education in general. Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that the research questions should not be posed directly to interviewees; therefore, the researcher translated the questions so that participants can respond from their "own experiences" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 57).

The findings of the study are presented and interwoven with the researcher's analysis so as to illuminate the process from which the revised conceptual framework emerged. During the first round of the interviews, themes emerged from formal topics on the protocol as well as the dialogue that ensued between the researcher and the participants. These themes are then analyzed against the data found in the literature analysis (presented in Chapter 2). This comparative analysis provided direction for the second round of interviews and further analysis.

Theoretical sampling, member-checking, and consensus building emerged as the main activities of the second round interviews. Theoretical sampling allowed the researcher to collect data specific to the emerging themes and conceptual categories to further support theory

development (Charmaz, 2006). Unlike quantitative studies where sampling techniques are used to seek representation to generalize, theoretical sampling is conducive for conceptual development (Charmaz, 2006). This technique was implemented by examining emerging areas of research and re-interviewing the study participants. Member-checking ensures that the researcher's interpretations of the findings reflect the voices of the participants. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Consensus building is a key outcome of the Delphi method and it ensures that the revised conceptual framework reflects the collective meaning of the study participants. Thus, it is critical to this study as it supports the epistemological assumptions of the researcher.

The result of both rounds of interviews and continuous literature analysis led to conceptual themes that, upon further analysis and reflection, become conceptual categories that validated or rejected aspects of the draft conceptual framework. Not surprisingly, gaps between the conceptual categories derived from the interview data and the initial draft of the framework existed. This initially reduced the validity of the framework (some constructs were better described than others, relationships among the constructs needed strengthening, and the visual presentation did not represent the narrative of the framework). These gaps led to revisions suggested by the expert panel and were incorporated by the researcher.

5.1   CHALLENGES FACING STUDENT AFFAIRS ORGANIZATIONS

The researcher opened the Delphi process by asking participants to describe the challenges facing student affairs organizations from their perspectives. This topic not only addressed the first research question, but also contextualized the participants' remaining responses—allowing the researcher to obtain a sense of the participants' mental models related to student affairs and organizational improvement. Understanding the challenges that face student affairs organizations helped to ground recommendations offered to improve them. Overall there were nine themes that emerged as challenges. Through the systematic analysis using NUD*IST, the researcher aggregated the themes into four salient conceptual categories. These categories and associated themes are enumerated below:

1. Developing a Professional Identity:

    - Silo Mentality

    - Role Ambiguity

    - Institutional and Professional Culture Knowledge

2. Aligning Diverse Interests:

    - Accountability

    - Assessment

3. Developing a Global Approach to Practice:

    - Diversity

    - Cultural Competence

4. Understanding Changes in Student Culture:

    - Technology

    - Student Consumerism

5.1.2 Developing a Professional Identity

Developing a professional identity represented a salient challenge for student affairs professionals. Participants discussed that the maturing student affairs profession engages interdisciplinary concepts, ideas, and frameworks to develop the profession's purpose and meaning. One participant, considered a student affairs historian, discussed how student affairs engaged in innovative thinking drawing upon disciplines such as psychology, human development, learning, etc. As a result, diverse and sometimes diverging conceptions about the role of the student affairs division and the practice of student affairs professionals permeated professional meetings. This observation is supported by early and contemporary scholars of student affairs (Astin & Christian, 1977; Nuss, 2003). Underlying the challenges of developing a professional identity were three reoccurring themes. Silo mentality was reported as a major challenge, and it refers to organizational members working and practicing within the boundaries of their functional unit (i.e., student activities, international services, career services, etc.) or only within the division, department or, area of specialty in which they were trained. Silo mentality is debilitating to student affairs organizations from two perspectives. First, within the division, organizational members working within the silo fail to share critical information across the division, which could be useful and necessary for enhancing student learning opportunities and outcomes (Love & Estanek, 2004). Students engage in fragmented and disconnected experiences making it difficult to promote opportunities for critical reflection and holistic learning. Commenting on this challenge, one practitioner noted, *"Silo mentality exists because organizational members don't know each other well or what their role is in the division…there is a lack of knowledge and even more so, a lack of communication."*

Thus, silo mentality prevents the exchange of information and knowledge created by individuals or knowledge created among a collective within a functional unit. Unfortunately, silo mentality is easily facilitated in the current structures of student affairs divisions (Blimling, 2001). For example, most student affairs divisions are divided based on the types of programs and activities (i.e., learning communities, student activities, leadership development opportunities, etc.) that are offered. Mapped onto these divisional structures, broader institutional structures driven by institutional politics and forces such as an institution's culture can facilitate silo thinking. For example, some divisions exist in institutions that view the division as "babysitters," simply watching over students when they are not in the classroom. In other institutions, critical student-oriented business functions such billing or registration are handled by the student affairs divisions (with little attention to student learning and development). However, some student affairs division are seen as co-providers of educational experiences equal to the education provided in the classroom. Thus, the diversity of these organizational structures—driven internally by the division and externally by the institution— can facilitate organizational members' complacency with and ability to work within a limited mental model. This tends to preclude student affairs practitioners from practicing in innovative ways. As the researcher delved further into the conversations with the participants, it became clear that other challenges (role ambiguity and lack of institutional and professional cultural knowledge) supports silo mentality and/or are the outcomes of silo mentality. The relationship among the three challenges was echoed throughout the Delphi process. The researcher analyzed the challenges in relation to the developing framework.

Role ambiguity supports the "Developing a Professional Identity" conceptual category. Role ambiguity is the lack of understanding of one's expectations in an organization. It can also

include not knowing organizational process, deadlines for goal achievement, as well as how one is expected to behave (Wilson-Strauss, 2005). Not surprisingly, individuals within divisions can be unaware of what is expected of them, especially if the institutional expectations and the profession's expectations are different. In addition, disparate curriculums abound in graduate preparation programs, ushering professionals into the field with varying degrees of competencies, capacities, and skills. In addition, the diversity of higher education institutions and their student affairs divisions precludes a grand narrative about the cultures in which a student affairs professional might work, further facilitating role ambiguity as professionals move to different organizations.

To reduce role ambiguity, study participants assert that, among other things, student affairs graduate preparation programs must do a better job of preparing new professionals. One participant noted how she was not at all aware of, or prepared to deal with the institutional or divisional politics. Ambiguity can contribute to low self-esteem and lack of confidence leading to ever-present complaints about the perceived lack of respect from other areas of the institution.

Role ambiguity can perpetuate silo functioning and has proven to be a barrier in organizational improvement (Wilson-Strauss, 2005). It also impacts an organizational member's job satisfaction, performance, productivity, goal attainment, etc. (Sawyer, 1992; Singh, 1998). One participant provided the following example:

> *We are not helping our organizations. We not only silo ourselves within*
>
> *student affairs divisions, but also silo ourselves from the institution...*
>
> *someone was just saying that they were invited to an employee lunch.*
>
> *They got there late and so all the chairs with the student affairs people*
>
> *were taken and so heaven forbid they had to sit with the registrar people.*

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And I was like, what a great opportunity to collaborate with the registrar's

office because you never know when you need help with the registrar's

office. And they're probably the worst office on many campuses, and yes,

but the person told me they didn't say anything the entire lunch. And this

is a person at the director's level.

This example highlights how silo mentality reduces opportunities for student affairs professionals to interact across the institution, reduces opportunities to develop and share knowledge, and reduces the opportunities for practitioners to strengthen their professional identities.

Lack of institutional and professional cultural knowledge is acknowledged as another challenge in many student affairs organizations. During the first round of interviews, scholars, more so than the practitioners, suggest that the responsibility for student affairs professionals has been and continues to be learning the institutional culture and politics. During the analysis of the first round of interviews, the researcher realized that developing a professional identity is constructed in the context of the internal and external environment, which constantly changes. Thus, understanding the institutional culture is an ongoing learning activity. This point was exemplified in one participant's comment:

School XXX was a highly residential institution where the preponderance

of the undergraduates was of traditional age…And so much of what we

focused on was how we could enrich the undergraduate residential

environment so that it would be complementary to the kinds of learning

that went on in the classroom…contrast that with an institution where the

average age of the undergraduate is 28. More students actually own their

homes then lived at home, and so we had to think about how we could take

advantage of the metropolitan setting up the institution…Instead of having

700 recreational teams and intramural basketball leagues, only 15 or 20

were needed….many, many of the students used the recreational facilities

much like a health club. All too often, student affairs professionals try to

superimpose what they did at one institution on another and that results in

frustration on their part and disillusionment and lack of identity. We must

understand the culture of where we work. This would reduce so much of

the challenge.

Further, the researcher and the scholar dialogued about how the literature of student affairs is emphasizing the need to understand institutional culture, but as the scholar noted, *"This is being advocated in student affairs literature, whether or not people are paying attention to what's on the printed page is anyone's guess."* In concluding on the topic, one participant noted that the first thing a student affairs professional should do when they step onto campus is seek out the campus historian, the person on every campus who really can share stories that provide a sense of what the institution is about. Having knowledge about the institutional culture can inform practice, but also provides points of influence that a student affairs professional can use to demonstrate value beyond the boundaries of the student affairs division. An underlying sentiment among the study participants is that developing a professional identity requires more effort from student affairs professionals.

After both rounds of interviews the researcher returned to the literature and further explored the topic of organizational culture to assess the extent to which culture impacts

professional identity development. This further analysis also illuminated how this challenge can

be addressed by student affairs professionals.

Organizational culture has been defined in myriad ways, but most authors agree that

organizational culture is the shared norms, behaviors, beliefs, and values that are embedded into

the daily operations of an organization (Berquist, 1992; Boan & Funderbunk, 2003; Schein,

1992). Schein (1992) more aptly suggests that organizational culture is

> A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it
>
> solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration
>
> that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore,
>
> to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive,
>
> think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 3).

This definition includes learning, perceiving, thinking, and feeling, which represents a socially

constructivist, humanistic world view. Although culture is often unspoken, it is transferred to

organizational members through a variety of socialization methods, which often occur at the time

a member joins the group (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000). It is shared learning and contributes to

increased organizational efficacy. Unlike organizational climate, culture extends to the deepest

levels of the organization and often endures over time. Researchers have argued that elements of

culture can be a barrier to organizational improvement precisely because of its stability and

endurance over time (Bensimon, 1995; Birnbaum, 2000).

Extant in the literature is diverse research on organizational culture with a myriad of

approaches for study. Tierney (1988) contends that while the complexity and multiplicity of

definitions of culture may seem daunting, it does not diminish the need to study the concept

when examining management and performance in higher education. Tierney (1988) developed a

framework for analyzing higher education culture which includes the mission, leadership, strategy, information, environment, and socialization processes. This framework is helpful because it provides a method for understanding organizational culture and its role in organizational improvement as well as pursuing cultural change. Using this framework, extensive field work can further one's understanding of higher education culture as it is constructed, perceived, and reinforced by the organizational members (including those in student affairs organizations). Tierney's framework provided additional perspectives that can be used for understanding and changing policies, practices, and structures that are geared toward improvement and sustainability efforts.

Schein (1992) also provides a useful framework for analyzing organizational cultures, suggesting that cultures are comprised of three structural levels: artifacts, values, and assumptions. Schein contends that the content embedded in these structures provides information about how organizations operate and what knowledge is shared among organizational members. For example, artifacts can represent an organization's capacity to survive and adapt to the both the internal and external environment. For example, founding documents, strategic plans, and other artifacts illustrate how the organization has evolved, reacted, and adapted over time, to name just a few examples. In the student affairs profession, it would include documents such as the Student Personnel Point of View (1937 and 1949), The Student Learning Imperative (1996), and Powerful Partnership: A Shared Responsibility for Learning (1998). Artifacts can include student activity memorabilia, vision and mission statements, strategic plans, etc. Values, such as participative decision-making, team accountability, etc. are uncovered from processes designed to assist the group in goal attainment and problem solving activities. Examples include answering the phone on three rings, escorting

students to health-related offices, co-teaching learning skills courses, to name a few. Understanding how an organization relates to the nature of human interactions and human agency demonstrates the organization's shared basic assumptions. Assumptions underlie values and can be challenging to detect. However, places like staff meetings, staff lounges, and other settings where student affairs professionals converge, can provide insight into the tacit knowledge generally taken for granted. Thus, Schein's (1990, 2006) work provides a practical approach upon which student affairs professionals can systematically study and discuss organizational cultures.

Researchers have commented on the lack of research on organizational culture in higher education, and it was in the mid 1980s and 1990s when the study of organizational culture gained interest in higher education. Kezar and Eckel (2002) note two major bodies of research on higher education culture. The first estimates that organizations must have a culture that fosters quality (i.e., quality cultures). For example, Boan and Funderbunk (2003) assert, organizational culture "seeks to stabilize organizational behavior" (p. 13). This stability could thwart efforts to change and promote a learning-orientated culture.

The second body of research suggests that the organizational culture mediates or determines the outcomes of quality improvement initiatives. In their work, Kezar and Eckel (2002) offer a third strain of potential research. Although, they indicate that quality improvement efforts in higher education have primarily focused on content (academic program review); inputs and structures (accreditation); outcomes (assessment); and processes and customers (TQM), literature on quality improvement in other disciplines examines the role of organizational culture in quality improvement efforts (Kujula, 2004; Boan & Funderbunk, 2003).

Tierney (1988) posits that a lack of organizational cultural understanding inhibits higher education organizations from improving and sustaining quality efforts. Even further, Freedman, Klugman, and Fife (1997) write that higher education's practices contribute to the institution's inability to promote quality improvement.

Unfortunately, higher education culture and student affairs research is not widespread. This lack of coverage is attributable, in part, to the complex nature of examining unpredictable and irrational human interactions with themselves, each other, and within the loosely-coupled internal and external higher education environment. Results indicated that culture is reconstituted among organizational members, which suggests its ability to change. Thus understanding, responding, and changing the organizational culture can assist student affairs organizations in addressing the challenges they confront today and in the future.

Thus, the three themes: silo mentality, role ambiguity, and lack of institutional knowledge and professional culture, as discussed by the participants, was analyzed and interpreted into the conceptual category of "Developing a Professional Identity." This category is related to the conceptual framework in its emphasis on knowledge development and management, as well as collaboration with members within a division and across the institution (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice play a critical role in helping individuals and groups engage in dialogue that promotes new understanding, new knowledge, new practices, and a stronger sense of identity. Developing a professional identity is concerned with what is known and how it is known, which Wenger contends is an aspect of communities of practice (Wenger, 2000). This conceptual category is closely related to the construct of a community of practice because professional identifies are socially constructed and constituted among multiple interactions with others in the environment. It is related to the organizational learning construct

because of lack of a professional identity prevents effective organizational learning activities to occur. One participant asserted:

> *We have professional development competency assessments that allow our staff to assess what their needs are, so that we can design programs around it around their needs, but then we also have programs where individuals can share their programs of discuss opportunities for collaboration…In this way, everyone will learn about the programs and services that are available.*

The challenge of developing a professional identity will undoubtedly cause student affairs organizations to continue to overlook opportunities to enhance student learning and engagement as well as demonstrate the kinds of outcomes that stakeholders seek in college graduates. Part of this development requires an understanding of the institutional culture and how this understanding must become a key knowledge area for organizational members, as it affects their ability to contribute to and impact the environment in which they work.

5.1.3 Aligning Diverse Interests: Accountability and Assessment

Aligning diverse interests was a second salient conceptual category derived from the challenges of accountability and assessment. Participants were generally concerned not only about the ends toward which accountability issues are pursued, but also the lack of leadership in framing the accountability issue in terms of organizational improvement for student learning and development. It was also acknowledged that accountability will continue to face higher education and student affairs over the next several years. Student affairs has not traditionally faced demands to demonstrate any outcomes. Processes have not been vetted and outcomes have

not been examined. Stakeholders believed in the claims asserted by the higher education and student affairs leaders. However, as the cost of higher education continues to rise, as employers' concerns mount about the lack of preparedness of students graduating from colleges and universities, and as government funding is reduced, resources that had once been abundant are directed to other societal investments (e.g., health care, defense, etc.).

In concert with the calls of accountability that are widely published in the discourse, assessment, as a method to demonstrate accountability, has gained wide acceptance as the set of activities that should be employed to understand organizational contexts, processes, outcomes, and impacts. Ewell (2005) writes that the most common meaning of assessment is "a program of locally designed and operated evaluation research intended to determine the effects of a college or university on its students, centered on learning outcomes and engaged in principally for the purpose of improving teaching and learning" (p. 105). Participants further opined that assessment activities, when conducted, are done for the purposes of justification much more so than for improvement for student learning.

Unlike in the primary educational system in which assessment has been in place for over thirty years (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001), assessment as a "movement" is very incoherent in higher education (Bogue & Hall, 2003). The incoherency is a result of two separate yet converging philosophies about the purpose of assessment. The first is the most wide-spread idea that assessment should be designed to determine the outcome of what students are learning (Wolff, 1995). In the past, little attention was paid to the competencies, attitudes, and behaviors that graduates gained as a result of their collegiate experience. Assessment was to be a means by which this knowledge would illustrate the value of higher education. The second philosophy suggests that the purpose of assessment is much broader, and is designed to determine the

effectiveness of all institutional programs, policies, and processes. It is a comprehensive approach to evaluating organizational efficiency and effectiveness. This much broader approach is closely aligned to core activities related to TQM. Wolff (1995) contends that the second philosophy is more comprehensive and should be used as the framework for organizational improvement activities in general. Gardiner (2002) writes, "A major justification for the national interest in outcomes assessment is to help institutions develop better information about themselves and thereby understand and improve their results" (p. 87). It is from this philosophical understanding that the researcher contends assessment should be employed. However, study participants, primarily those in practice, argue that assessment sounds good in theory, but is very challenging to incorporate into daily activities.

Accountability has been the primary reason for conducting any kind of assessment initiatives as high profile reports about the problems of undergraduate education began to surface (these reports were enumerated in Chapter 1). Thus, improving organizational quality became the secondary motivation. Institutions submitted plans that included statements of student learning outcomes, data collection processes, improvement plans, and reporting structures. In the early years, assessment was seen by most faculty as a management fad (Ewell, 2005).

As time went on, many institutions failed to develop meaningful assessment programs, and of those who did develop programs, the diversity of outcomes, metrics, and processes made it difficult to communicate aggregate or meaningful data (Ewell, 2005). In addition, assessment was not answering the questions about what students were actually learning. So while assessment in some ways was an appropriate approach for institutions to demonstrate accountability (i.e., to be self-regulating and self-improving), over time, the "accountability toward what end" differed. However, Ewell (2005) contends that by the 1990s, the accrediting agencies were promoting

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assessment.   Accreditation agencies focused on assessing processes and more recently have embraced assessment of student learning outcomes.

In addition, outcomes assessment has garnered more attention since the early 1990s because it addresses issues related to student learning (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001). Study participants asserted that the knowledge gained from assessment activities can dramatically increase the amount and quality of student learning and engagement activities and effectively addressed immediate issues or concerns.   For 21st-century student affairs organizations, David Boud (2000) forecasts that the concept of assessment must be examined in the context of organizational sustainability in knowledge and learning society, supporting the researcher's contention for the need for reframed conceptualizations of organizational improvement.   Unfortunately, assessment activities are not widely understood, meaningfully employed in most student affairs divisions, or is used to address the larger, more complex organizational issues (second philosophical thread in the discourse).   This critique is further supported during the study when participants suggest that assessment must actively engage those who are directly responsible for not only the outcomes, but also the context, process, and impacts that are sought to be improved.   One scholar adamantly noted:

> *I'm seeing assessment whereby the people to whom the process*
>
> *matters the most are involved. I'm saying that they come up with*
>
> *their own questions for the [assessment] process and for collecting*
>
> *data and then they come back together and consider what the*
>
> *implications will look like. And they decide what is feasible to do*
>
> *and then they do it and then they come back together and look at*
>
> *some more data, which is designed to tell them whether or not the*

action to improve an action made a difference. These are kinds of

activities I feel have made the difference.

In addition, practitioners have not learned how to conduct assessments effectively (assessment was not a widely adopted topic for courses across graduate preparation programs). The culture in many student affairs divisions is not conducive to assessment activities. It is not that professionals are not interested in these activities. In fact, one participant noted a general sentiment among the study participants when sharing the following concern, *"[Talking about conducting assessment] I think it's aligning values and aspirations with actual practice. So often times, we will have aspirations for what we want to be and how we want to be, but were not necessarily sure what practice will get us there."* For example, student affairs practitioners lament over the time that is required to conduct assessments even for just documentation purposes because of the immediate demands that require more time. Part of the culture in some student affairs organizations is the need to address the most urgent (usually student-related) issues occurring in real time. One participant noted, while explaining the time commitments needed for assessment:

> *[For a student affairs professional in judicial affairs] There are a lot of*
>
> *individuals to deal with when you're handling just one case, and all of that*
>
> *time is taken away from us being able to develop either new programs for*
>
> *students in general or to enhance services. To do a review or assessment*
>
> *of what we're doing, all of those kinds of things get put on the back burner*
>
> *because you really have to focus on the here and now, on the individual*
>
> *who's acting out and how this behavior is affecting themselves and others.*

Another participant opined,

For me, it comes down to what has to be done right now, be it a parent

who is calling the chancellor, who then tracks me down about a student

issue, or a fire alarm that has gone off, or developing emergency

preparedness plan in the case of a some disaster. I know that assessment

activities could probably help us enormously, it is still going to take time

to change the culture of the organization though, we are currently "fire

fighters" every day we are reacting to fires and least able to sit back and

reflect on anything we've done, or better yet better plan in light of

assessment and knowledge we have. But you know, in addition to this,

many people in student affairs organizations are not taught assessment

during their graduate education, or they are simply not traditional student

affairs professionals and their professional identity is tied to other fields

like counseling or health services.

Unless and until assessment is seen primarily as way to improve student learning outcomes, student affairs organizations will employ a host different strategies to play catch up in terms of addressing stakeholders concerns. Unfortunately, unless the leadership and culture change, these activities will be within a shared mental model of compliance and documentation and not organizational improvement to improve student outcomes.

Alexander (2000) observed that higher education in general must be responsive to "societal requirements" for accountability, but that higher education institutions must transform in order to prepare students to compete in a global society. Study participants report how the lack of demonstrating the value-added of programs and services has, from their perspective, contributed to reduce funding. Study participants contended that student affairs organizations

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have often bared the brunt of reduced funding precisely because the outcomes of funding are unknown, unnecessary, or unrelated to the educational mission of the institution.

Therefore, comprehensive assessment activities must be integrated into student affairs activities, as they can mitigate speculations and concerns about how resources are allocated and used. Fundamentally, it provides student affairs professionals with the knowledge of what is working and what is not working according to the prescribed goals of programs and services.

Aligning accountability with assessment is a challenge that student affairs organizations must work to overcome. This conceptual category is appropriate in the context of the conceptual framework because the challenges it represents can be mitigated within a learning culture that engages in organizational activities like assessment, using knowledge management systems to develop and share information among communities of practitioners interested in the questions being asked, and led by those who understand the value of knowledge as a personal and professional advantage. Communities of practice are ideal settings for developing, implementing, and communicating assessment activities and results. They are also settings that leverage influence and develop shared understanding, agreement, and a plan of action to justify or modify organizational activities, processes, and practices.

5.1.4 Developing a Global Posture for Practice: Diversity and Cultural Competence

Developing a global posture for practice became a salient category during the data analysis because it represented the widely expressed challenge that student affairs organizations must be prepared, as well as prepare students to live and work in a global society. The diversity of students on college campuses (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2002) necessitates the need for multicultural competence development for student affairs professionals

(King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Multicultural competence allows individuals to effectively interact with others across cultures. Morales (2003) asserts that a culturally competent person understands himself, the culture of others and the challenges facing oppressed groups based on cultural differences. Student affairs organizations have traditionally been the voice for issues that affect marginalized groups (Pope 1993). In some instances, the terms are used interchangeably. When study participants did distinguish between the two terms, different conceptualizations of diversity still emerged. For the scholars, the term most often refers to the courses within graduate preparation programs that prepared future student affairs professionals to work with diverse learners matriculating at high rates into higher education institutions (Komives & Kuh, 1988; Phelps & Tobin, 1998). This conceptualization of diversity led to several comments that, again, were critical of graduate preparation programs that do not address diversity issues and that the same time, do not develop or enhance students' multicultural competence. Highlighting this sentiment, one participant noted:

> *I'm going back to XXX, and I really need to take some classes… that would*
>
> *prepare me for counseling minorities, [it included] a sociology and race course…*
>
> *I created all these classes that would help me with cross-cultural counseling and*
>
> *cross-cultural communication…I developed my own cognate. I didn't know what*
>
> *to call it and I just said maybe I call multicultural affairs or something.*

While the need to incorporate multicultural competence in professional development and training preparation have been proffered by leaders and scholars in the field (Pope & Reynolds, 1997), it is unclear the extent to which these challenges have been incorporated in programs, and even if these challenges have embedded in organizational cultures (not just espoused values with artifacts). Commenting on this concern, a participant revealed:

Like the issue of diversity. For many institutions and student affairs divisions, diversity was not a part of their core or their founding mission. So it's not a part of the mission upon which institutional structures or practices were built. So it was an add-on. Now, it's become a contemporary value. But the question is, once you commit to it, how do you realign your resources to give it the same level and honoring as those other issues that are part of the historical mission? Most institutions have not found a way to do that. It still is an add-on mission and not a core of the mission— particularly not in the practice sense.

Study participants' sentiments about the challenge of addressing cultural competency and diversity are not novel; in fact, many scholars have put forth the need for higher education and student affairs to become more adept at working within a culturally-rich context (Levin & Cureton, 1992). McEwen and Roper (1994) write, "It is the collective responsibility of student affairs professionals to respond more effectively and knowledgeably to diverse student groups on college campuses" (p. 49).

Unfortunately, developing cultural competency among student affairs professionals has taken a back seat to other priorities. However, to improve student learning and development of all students in higher education, student affairs professionals must be able to work with students and colleagues who are different. In one conversation, a participant commented that:

Less in my scholarly work, but as a senior administrator, I asserted that the effectiveness of an affairs organization, as you had indicated, rested

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on an understanding of diversity and feelings of passion for the education

of all and ensuring a quality education for all.

Additionally, the conversations regarding diversity also illuminated the need to effectively prepare students to live and work in a global, ever-changing, and diverse society. While this can ultimately stem from student affairs professionals' knowledge about cultural issues, ultimately, student affairs must provide engagement and developmental opportunities for students to gain awareness, knowledge, and skills to be productive in culturally diverse settings.

As with the other conceptual categories developed from the data analysis, developing a global approach to practice is related to the conceptual framework in similar ways. Organizational learning activities (including assessment), can be used to gain and leverage knowledge about the impact of diversity and cultural competency on student learning and development. These activities can also create repositories of knowledge that both practitioners and students can draw upon in their personal journeys of professional development. Communities of practice can provide the space for organizational learning activities particularly useful on such a sensitive issue as diversity and cultural competency. Contingencies of practitioners passionate about these challenges can engage others interested in the topic to improve the work occurring in student affairs organizations.

5.1.5 Understanding Changes in Student Culture: Technology, Student Consumerism

Participants agree that the changing student culture is a major challenge facing student affairs organizations and higher education in general. The underlying themes of this challenge are the ever-increasing role of technology and student consumerism.

The role of technology is shaping how students interact with their environment and others. Study participants agreed that this challenge will impact how student affairs divisions

operate in the years to come. Through the dialogue with the participants, the researcher realized that the student affairs profession has had an interesting "ownership" over the student cultures that exist in higher education institutions. Thus, while technology is the venue through which the student culture is changing, student affairs organizations must adapt their influences in light of these changes. Highlighting this interpretation, one participant noted:

> *Understanding how students learn in different ways is an important challenge that student affairs must address. They [students] might decide that playing on a video game is a much more important experience for them than participating in our leadership development program and so how do we deal with that? So we got a whole group of different learners... [And] we have all these involvement opportunities that may not be the ones that new generation relates to.*

Several scholars have commented on the impact of technology on student affairs organization (Kleinglass, 2005; Love & Estanek, 2004). Kleinglass (2005) asserts that technology "involves the generation of knowledge and process to develop systems that solve problems and extend human capabilities" (p. 26). This conception is especially useful in this research because study participants expressed concerns that student affairs organizations are not leading technological progress in ways that advance student learning and development. Kleinglass (2005) laments that although it is no surprise that technology has dramatically impacted the way in which students gain knowledge, student affairs organizations have been very slow to engage in the conversation around how technology impacts student learning and development. This insight demonstrates the complex and interrelated nature between this

challenge and the challenge of student affairs professionals developing a stronger sense of professional identity.

After the first round of interviews, the researcher further explored the idea of a changing student culture and its relationship to organizational changes in student affairs divisions. Kleinglass' (2005) study of student affairs professionals and their use of technology in practice illustrated that student affairs professionals are practicing with antiquated policies and procedures to deal with student conduct related to technology. Kelinglass' work supports both the information shared by the study participants and the researcher's perception that this challenge is people driven. Study participants contend that student affairs organizations are trapped in a mental model of traditional program and service delivery. Technology is not the challenge as much as it is people's reluctance to engage it.

Aided by advances in technology and its rapid dissemination of knowledge, study participants agreed that student consumerism is a challenge facing student affairs divisions and is facilitated by proponents who are driven by efficiency, effectiveness, and fear of rising competition. Often done as a reaction to competing interests such as propriety schools, corporate universities, reduced resources and the like, programs, activities, and services designed to primarily satisfy students have permeated some student affairs organizations. This is particularly apparent in organizations guided by a student services perspective (and not a student learning and development perspective) (Blimling, 2001). The study participants agree that as scrutiny continues to aim at higher education, student affairs organizations will have to develop structures to function more like a business, aiding its sustainability and supporting the institution's efforts at mitigating the rising costs of the institution's academic endeavors. Long and Lake (1996) comment that consumerism can "undermine" development and learning opportunities if students

view themselves as customers of service and not responsible contributors to their own educational pursuits.

5.1.6   Researcher's Reflection on the Challenges Facing Student Affairs Organizations

The challenges facing student affairs organizations and the student affairs profession are not unlike many loosely-coupled organizations with multiple and diverse goals as well as activities.   Interestingly, these challenges have been articulated in the higher education and student affairs literature including Woodard, Love, and Komives (2000) and Kezar and Eckel (2002).

Results of this topic on the protocol confirmed and also illuminated other reasons why a conceptual framework for organizational improvement was necessary.   Most concretely, it attends to the social and humanistic aspects of organizational functioning. Not to be overlooked, current quality improvement approaches serve useful purposes, but have been framed in micro-level mental models.   The challenges articulated in the study are not new or original. These challenges are also not exhaustive. Many local attempts have been made to address these concerns with varying levels of success. Several of these approaches were discussed in Chapter 1. Through further analysis of the interview data and literature, learning and learning how to learn emerged as fundamental practices needed in student affairs organizations. Improving student affairs organizations requires attention to improving the organization, processes, and practices employed by of the members in the organization, but also modifying the socially constructed cultures in which organizational members work.

Concerns about the universality of any approach, including the draft conceptual framework, were expressed by two scholars who contend that proposing an all encompassing

framework for improvement might be inappropriate given the very individual nature of learning, understanding, and practicing. This critique was well received as it speaks to a prescriptive approach to organizational improvement put forth by many managerial and empirical works on organizational improvement. As much as the researcher tried to avoid this pitfall, it still came across in the initial materials reviewed by these two participants.

The researcher contends that the framework developed in this study addresses these challenges of student affairs precisely because it does not provide a "how to" approach to improving student affair organizations, it proffers an approach for student affairs organizations to learn how to learn, to continually examine internal and external environment (particularly the institutional culture), and to develop research and evidence-based strategies to improve their student affairs organizations. It is a foundation upon which student affairs organizations can map their program and services and guide their learning activities.

These challenges will not abate any time soon; however, a proactive approach which rests on an organization's ability to learn, share knowledge, and use the knowledge to improve the lives of students and organizational members is practical.

5.2   A QUALITY STUDENT AFFAIRS ORGANIZATION

Describing a quality student affairs organization was another topic on the interview protocol. Participants were asked to consider what a quality student affairs organization would look like. This topic was important because this data further contextualized the participants' comments regarding the conceptual framework and further elaborated on the first research question. In other words, since the goal for developing framework is to offer insight into how

student affairs can improve, it was clear that understanding the ends toward which the student affairs organizations need to improve was important. This question also allowed participants to reflect on what they considered to be an ideal student affairs organization. This contributed to assessing the practicality of the conceptual framework developed.

Participants provided numerous attributes that described a quality student affairs organization. In fact, most of the comments were articulated as solutions to the aforementioned challenges (see section 5.1). For examples, both scholars and practitioners suggest that a quality student affairs organizations is one that understands not only the institutional culture in which it functioned, but also the evolving knowledge base and culture of the student affairs field. One participant noted that a good student affairs organization understands their role in the institution. Another contended that a quality organization has evidence that the programs and services they are providing are improving the skills of the students. Yet still, participants agreed that student affairs professionals and divisions should use established standards, model guidelines, and knowledge about student affairs and institutional cultures, about student learning and development, about organizational politics, and the myriad of other knowledge gaps.

In addition to learning about and adopting to the rapidly changing internal and external environment, a quality student affairs organization influences the institutional policies, structures, and procedures—it is an organization that develops and shares knowledge that is useful to the institution. A practitioner noted, *"A student affairs division is one of the best in the country when it is not a silo in itself…it is so interwoven into the institution, that it is a driving force that makes the institution click."*

Other themes connoting a quality student affairs organization included the ability to take risks. This attribute is replete within the quality management and organizational improvement

literature. Risk-taking allows organizational members to reduce fear of retribution for making mistakes and making decisions. Risk-taking also allows organizational members to be creative and explore areas that are of interest to them. Participants also suggested that a quality student affairs organization is evidence-based—that decisions about activities, processes, practice, and structures are based on data that have been vetted and transformed into knowledge. In addition, one participant articulated a shared sentiment that the student affairs members must be actively involved and engaged in determining questions for which evidence will be sought. In her vast experience with assessment and accreditation, another scholar shared the following observation:

> *I do think that people respond to evidence-based efforts when it is*
>
> *couched in an environment where they feel comfortable in doing*
>
> *something that they value. I think you first of all have to have*
>
> *good purpose for what you're doing and then you put together the*
>
> *right people to think about it, and think about how it can be*
>
> *improved. And then those people who know the process will have*
>
> *questions that they want answered. And then you collect some*
>
> *data, and then you bring that back to the group that will help them*
>
> *answer the questions.*

Lastly, "educational quality" was a theme referring to the quality of student learning, both the extent to which the institution provides an environment conducive to student learning, and the extent to which this environment leads to the development of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and predispositions of value to students and the society they are preparing to serve.

5.3 FEEDBACK ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTS IN THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section provides the results and analysis of the Delphi process regarding the constructs of the conceptual framework. It is designed to articulate the themes that emerge as the participants reviewed and discussed the constructs of the conceptual framework. The findings are presented in the manner requisite for validating a conceptual framework: the constructs description, the explanation and appropriateness of the relationship among the constructs, as well as the practicality of the constructs.

5.3.1 Organizational Learning

The major critique of this construct was the definition and its interchangeably with the Learning Organization concept. In fact, during the first round, the researcher re-described the definition of organizational learning in the context of the framework as well as delineated its difference to the learning organization concept. Two scholars contended that the construct should be better explained for those who will read about the framework in journals. Upon further analysis of the scholarly literature, the researcher determined that the challenge of the construct, as it relates to organizational improvement, is associated more with its unfamiliarity within the student affairs discourse. For example, during the first round of interviews one participant noted, *"All organizations learn, so I am not how what you are proposing isn't just a fancy term for what is already going on the field."* As the researcher culled "learning" as the fundamental activity in student affairs organizations, it is this preceding example that led to more specificity with the term. It is not that student affairs professionals and organizations need to learn, but that

they need to know what to learn, how to learn, and how the results from the learning can be integrated into daily practices and life experiences. McManus (2006) asserts that learning must be seen relevant to one's work. The researcher compared the data from interviews with the literature analysis, revised the description and enhanced the relationship of the construct to the other constructs in the framework by emphasizing learning the fundamental activity.

Participants noted that the while organizational learning does make sense in the framework, there should be more discussion about actual learning organizational activities. This critique was well noted. The researcher therefore included two substantive activities in addition to assessment—productive reflection and evaluative inquiry.

5.3.1.1 Productive Reflection

Productive reflection is the process of critically thinking about work activities, which then leads to action. It is productive in that it is a cycle leading to action (Boud, Cressey, & Docherty, 2006). Boud et al. write, "Reflection is a complex, multifaceted, and messy process that is tamed and domesticated at the risk of destroying what it can offer. Reflection is a discursive way of creating space for focusing on problematic situations and of holding them for consideration without premature rush to judgment" (p. 23). In educational literature, this process is referred to as "problematizing." Boud et al. suggest what productive reflection entails:

- An organizational intent and collective orientation (versus individual);

- Work activities connected with learning experiences;

- Stakeholders participation;

- A focus on generative possibilities;

- Supportive developmental in process; and

- The ability to change (2006).

Productive reflection can be conceptualized from the individual, group, and organizational perspectives. From the individual perspective, reflection is a separation of thought and action. It is an opportunity to step back from a situation and develop a sense of meaning. Reflection is an emotional process where one unearths deeply held assumptions and beliefs that precipitate a feeling, thought, or behavior. This examination can cause a certain level of anxiety and other emotions that should receive attention during the reflection process (Boud et al., 1985).

From a social context perspective, reflection is conducted in a group setting, among peers and colleagues. In this instance, reflection becomes a collective process that enables assumptions and beliefs to surface quickly and often objectively by participants in the process.

Productive reflection requires time for developmental learning, which is different from adaptive learning, must be balanced with routine work activities. Resources that are necessary for effective reflection include knowledge and understanding of the task, awareness of the opportunity to learn, and a level of self-identity to recall past experiences. Developmental learning and reflection should become an integral aspect of the organizational culture.

5.3.1.2 Evaluative Inquiry

Given the societal context in which higher education and student affairs organizations operate, Preskill and Torres (1999) suggest that evaluative inquiry is an ideal activity when organizations are expected to do more with less. The researcher gravitates toward this activity following this interpretation presented by the authors, "This approach is much more aligned with the interpretive perspective of organizational learning. That is, learning from an evaluative inquiry is a social construction...It is socially situated and is mediated through participants'

previous knowledge and experiences" (p. xix). This type of evaluation is based on the goal of gaining knowledge to make informed decisions. Regarding student affairs, one participant noted,

> *The more states and other agencies reduce the funding to higher*
>
> *education in general; student affairs organizations suffer even*
>
> *greater financial losses."* Another participant notes that *"because*
>
> *of the decrease in funding from the institutions, student affairs*
>
> *organizations must seriously begin to examine their organizations*
>
> *more like businesses…outsourcing becomes a viable option.*

In addition, evaluative inquiry looks beyond micro-level assessment of activities (e.g., programs, services, etc.) to examine more fundamental and significant organizational issues. The researcher suggests for student affairs organizations to improve; this kind of broader investigation is needed.

In the participants' conception of organizational improvement and affirming the researcher's contention, organizational learning can only take place in a learning organization, such that in order for organizational learning to occur, a learning culture, leadership, communication mechanisms, as well as systems and structures must be in place. Evaluative inquiry "helps organizations' members reduce uncertainty, clarify direction, build community, and ensure that learning is part of everyone's job" (Preskill & Torres, 1999, p.3). A study participant echoed this sentiment portending:

> *We enrich people's jobs by giving them experiences outside of their*
>
> *primary levels of responsibility. This provides opportunities to learn*
>
> *outside of the [student affairs] organization and allows us to establish a*

relationship with departments we need to work more closely with. [For

example], we have a Center for teaching excellence and faculty program;

since we have expertise in managing student behavior we have designed

an intervention program for faculty who needed help dealing with

disruptive students. This is certainly a step in the right direction.

Four processes entail evaluative inquiry and they are aligned with the humanistic and constructivist assumption. These processes include dialogue, reflection, probing questions, as well as understanding the organizational culture. These processes align with and affirm the developing conceptual framework.

In conclusion, the organizational learning construct is revised to provide a better distinction between it and the overarching concept of the learning organization. Essentially, organizational learning is a set of activities implemented by organizations to cultivate knowledge and build knowledge capacity. Organizational learning activities can include a number of activities, which should be intentional, well-designed, and inclusive of the professional and personal needs of organizational members. Based on the research study, the researcher contends that assessment, productive reflection, and evaluative inquiry are key organizational learning activities that should be pursued.

The initial draft of the conceptual framework did not outline these activities. After the Delphi method was employed, inclusion of the activities and distinguishing organizational learning from the learning organization added to the validity of the conceptual framework.

5.3.2   Knowledge Management

From the interviews, the construct of Knowledge Management received the least critiques. Participants indicate that that the construct is described well and seems to logically flow from the organizational learning construct. While organizational learning represents activities associated with "learning," knowledge management represents intentionally designed systems, processes, and structures to develop, capture, and transform the learning into knowledge that can be embedded into the organizational culture. The relationship between this construct and the others in the framework are adequately explained. One participant noted:

> *We believe so deeply in obtaining, developing, and sharing*
>
> *knowledge, that we have subscriptions to over 160 publications.*
>
> *And we routinely and intentionally prepare to discuss and reflect*
>
> *on what is learned so that we can further develop the skills and*
>
> *competencies of those who work in our organization.*

Highlighting the appropriateness of the construct, another participant asserts:

> *Well, there is a lot of talk about the knowledge society, so it makes a lot of*
>
> *sense that this construct would be in the framework for improving student*
>
> *affairs. Things are changing so quickly, we need to keep up.*

After the first round of the Delphi, most study participants concurred that more information about what knowledge is needed to be managed (created, shared, disseminated, stored, etc) would be more practical. The draft of the conceptual framework does not describe knowledge areas or management systems. It was from this critique that the researcher reanalyzed the data describing the challenges facing student affairs and descriptions of a quality student affairs organization. During the second round of interviews, after participants reviewed the data

from the first round, it was evident the knowledge areas including institutional and professional culture, the changing student culture, assessment, and multicultural competence. Other areas emerged during the second round of interviews and included institutional politics and resource allocation.

As the researcher listened to interviews and compared the participants' responses, there was a need to return to the literature to obtain a better sense of how to better describe how knowledge management can improve student affairs. From this examination, the researcher asserted that a student affairs organization must develop a shared vision about what knowledge is most important both individually and organizationally, and then implement the best organizational learning activities to obtain and use that knowledge.

Extant in the literature, communities of practice are places in which knowledge can be developed, shared, and embedded in the organizational culture. Knowledge management initiatives in organizations across industries are beginning to support and sustain the activities of communities of practice. The next section discusses the results and analysis of the communities of practice construct.

5.3.3 Communities of Practice

This construct was well received by the participants primarily because it introduced new language that scholars and practitioners can use to enhance traditional teams, workgroups, committees, etc. Not like these other organizational structures, communities of practice demonstrate a less formal, highly social, and collaborative structure whereby explicit and tacit knowledge is developed and shared. One participated comments, *"[on communities of practice] this is great, and it provides me a new way of looking at collectives of organizational members."*

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It is further asserted that communities of practice offer a new perspective for understanding how individuals can pursue professional development opportunities that are aligned not only with organizational interests, but also personal interests. The general sentiment is that communities of practice probably exist to some extent in all student affairs organizations already; however, none suggest that they are supported and facilitated by the formal organizational structure. One practitioner has recently instituted monthly hot topic sessions, where staff members can come together based on a personal interest related to student affairs. These monthly gatherings are initiated by a staff member and are prepared and delivered by staff members based on what they have learned from any number of opportunities they have pursued.

The researcher revised the construct to make it less prescriptive, but highlights how it can reflect the culture of the institution. In fact, one participant contended, *"With this construct, I can see all kinds of communities emerging; imagine culturally-orientated communities that seek to develop the needs of members. Wouldn't that provide a wonderful, supportive environment?"*

5.3.4   Transformational Leadership

Results from the first round interviews and even the pilot study suggest that of all four constructs in the learning organization framework, transformational is the least appropriate for the framework and for student affairs organizations. While the term in itself represents the kind of leadership needed to make large change in organizations, it is based on old thinking about organizational life. The critique centered on its hierarchical and bureaucratic approach—not in its intent, but in its implementation; this construct represented leadership from a positional position. One scholar notes, *"There is a very unfortunate misuse of language in the field, and actually James MacGregor Burns called it transforming leadership not transformational."*

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Scholars such as Bass and Aviolio (1994) have taken the concept and produced a very practical and tangible assessment of determining whether an individual has transformational leadership attributes. As a critique to the construct in the conceptual framework, another participant opines:

> *So as much as possible, you should shift the leadership language so that we recognize that leadership is happening all over the place. And if we really do talk about transforming leadership, all of us could do that. You don't have to be another vice president, the director and stuff like that, I mean any of us could exhibit that transforming leadership and the various places that we live and work.*

Echoing these concerns were comments from scholars who indicated that the construct is dated, not as closely aligned to student affairs work as other constructs, and that its description, while in-depth, is not connected to the emerging socially grounded framework being developed in this study.

5.3.5 Researcher Reflections on Leadership

The role of leadership in quality improvement of higher education institutions cannot be overemphasized. Leadership has been cited as a necessary element for change. Leadership is intrinsically linked to organizational culture, which facilitates or hinders quality improvement efforts (Schein, 1992). Phfeffer (1978) contends that the concept of leadership is challenging for two main reasons including the ambiguity and the many constructs used to explain the phenomena. However, leadership and leadership development are sources of competitive

advantage.   The researcher contends that leadership is a critical factor in organizational improvement efforts.

Yukl (2002) and others suggest that little research has been conducted on leadership and learning. Albert (1999) suggests that self-awareness is an important aspect of a learning-orientated leadership model. He further asserts:

> A description of the learning capacity for leader involves: the capacity to seek out and learn about the effects of our behavior and the perceptions of the others about our behavior through experience, observation, and listening; and making adjustments in our interpersonal relationships in a way that is supportive the real self and its development; and to foster a climate where this process becomes the standard for all members of the organization. (Albert, 1999, p. 13)

A major limitation to organizational improvement can be organizational members with bruised self-concepts. Albert (1999) contends that leaders must have a healthy sense of self in order to facilitate and encourage a learning-centered environment.

The drawback to Albert's psychological approach to leadership, as well as some of the other leadership theories and studies is the problem outlined by Caldwell (2005) in which he contends, "These formulations of singular ideals have both exaggerated the autonomous role of leaders and managers in organizational change and undermined the various practical roles other human actors can actually play in the process of organizational change" (p. 105). In addition, if leadership is narrowly perceived as the power placed in one or few organizational members, then leadership fail to address the pluralism, decentralization, and changing decision-making processes that now exists (Caldwell, 2005).

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Additionally, leadership for a learning organization must exist at all levels of the organization. Old ideals of leaders no longer prevail in today's knowledge-driven society. Leaders are responsible for learning and building the capacity for the organization to learn. Leaders are designers (social architect), stewards, and teachers (Senge, 2006). A leader's role in quality improvement includes a focus on systems thinking.

Schein, (1992) contends that a leader's job is to uncover assumptions, determine how assumptions are manifested in values, artifacts, and symbols, and determine "how to deal with the anxiety unleashed when these levels of culture are challenged" (p. 27).

5.3.6 Systemic Leadership

Given the general sentiment that the transformational leadership construct was not the best selection for the direction, purpose, and audience of the conceptual framework, the researcher selected a construct mentioned by one participant who stated:

> *You should really consider the work regarding systemic*
>
> *leadership. These colleagues have worked in student affairs,*
>
> *understand the culture of the profession, and provide a model that*
>
> *is much more aligned with the framework you have developed*
>
> *here…using a construct already associated with the profession will*
>
> *increase the likelihood that your framework will be practical and*
>
> *relevant to scholars and practitioners.*

This sentiment is shared with the study participants during the second of round of the Delphi method.

Systemic leadership is a leadership construct situated in the context of the knowledge-networked era (Allen & Cherry, 2000). This era represents the worldview that knowledge and the networks supporting knowledge can only be understood from a systems perspective. Aligned with systems thinking (the fifth discipline of the learning organization) articulated by Senge, the explosion of technology has created these flexible networks through which information is shared. From a social constructivist perspective, these networks are integrated and interrelated webs of social interactions and relationships among people within organizations (Allen & Cherry, 2000). Formal relationships dissipate and boundaries between organizational lines become less clear. This idea is supported by a participant who noted, *"A quality student affairs organizations has a flat organization chart, it is about the relationships that are created and the way in which people collaboratively to get things done."*

The framework for systemic leadership is the combination of three new ways of working that leads to a new way of leading (Allen & Cherry, 2000). The first new way of working encourages student affairs professionals to use the relational nature of the student affairs professions to engage their institutions differently. In this way, student affairs practitioners can learn more and become facilitators of change in the face of a changing societal and higher education landscape. Unfortunately, the dominant mental model in student affairs organizations is a passive approach to influencing change within the broader institutional community. It harkens back to the study participants' concerns with the time needed to conduct assessment, and it is a similar to barriers regarding the time needed to cultivate and nurture relationships (Allen & Cherry, 2000).

The second new way of working concerns how student affairs professionals influence change. Allen and Cherry (2000) contend that rapid change in today's society is simply the

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result of influences in a connected, networked system. Student affairs practitioners must shift their mental models to understand that change can be initiated by anyone, in any setting, at any time. There are different approaches to change, which Allen and Cherry outline their work. Table 10 is a reproduction of the change approaches they put forth

Table 10: Different Approaches to Change

	Making Change	**Surviving Change**	**Organic Change**
Focus:	Change is forced or driven by positional leadership. Changes come from within the organization.	Change is forced upon the organization by the external environment.	The organization generates and influences change. It becomes a learning organization.
Organizational Values:	Change is predictable; the organization seeks "buy-in" from members.	Crisis management, constantly adjusting to adapt to the external environment.	Entails new ways of relating, influencing, and learning to contribute to and enhance the changing society.
Meaning Making:	Based on predictable patterns and mission driven		Meaning is discovered in the relationships with others and that shared knowledge and innovation will lead to news of influencing the organization.

Source: Allen & Cherry (2000, p. 49)

These approaches represent cultural values held by organizations—demonstrating the nature of an enduring of organizational culture. This new way of influencing change requires student affairs professionals to do the following:

1. Be open to systems thinking;

2. Use diverse perspectives to understand the institutional environment;

3. Hire people who are flexible and adaptable to change; and

4. Enhance the resilience of the organization (Allen & Cherry, 2000).

Systemic learning constitutes the third area in which student affairs practitioners must work. This entails viewing the learning process as a comprehensive developmental activity that is much more than the teaching and instruction that occurs in the classroom. A broader perspective of learning accounts for the need to develop strategies and embed learning activities within the organization, understanding that there is no prescription for how, when, and in what ways it should occur. Related to the construct of communities of practice, Allen and Cherry (2000) assert that individuals and communities shape learning, and the extent to which a learning culture exists in the organizations impacts the learning opportunities available and the impacts for organizational improvement.

These three new ways of working in a knowledge driven era converge into systemic leadership. Allen and Cherry (2000) contend that student affairs practitioners are in a unique position to exude this kind of leadership because of the collaborative, social-orientated nature of the field and very often, most often represented in their work with students.

In order to function effectively and lead systemically, student affairs professionals must develop relationships with professionals in the division and across the higher education institutions to enhance relationships. In addition, influencing change is a collective effort and so more than one person must direct energy nurturing and cultivating relationships. Collaboration becomes a key activity. Understanding that change can be initiated from any direction (not just top-down) is an assumption of this construct as well as the idea that learning is social and constant. Allen and Cherry (2000) further suggest that these assumptions should not be foreign to the student affairs organization, as many student affairs professionals engage students in these activities all of the time through their extra-curricular activities.

Systemic leadership focuses on building human capacities so that leadership and the health of an organization can be sustained over time, not just over the tenure of an individual. In addition, the processes of student affairs practice become as important as the outcomes. The systemic leadership model entails four new ways of working, all of which are aligned with the learning organization framework developed in this study.

This construct was selected not only because it aligns with student affairs philosophy, the description and application of the construct demonstrates a strong relationship with the other three constructs in the learning organization framework developed herein. It was also selected because it does provide some prescriptive capacities that could jump start student affairs professionals stuck in a reactionary posture and feeling like the ability to engage in anything but the crisis of the day is not futile. After analyzing the interview data and results from the literature analysis, the researcher concluded that systemic leadership is the overarching construct from which the others flow. It is a lens through which the learning organization framework can be seen as an approach to improving student affair organizations.

5.4   GENERAL FEEDBACK ABOUT THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ITS PRESENTATION

General feedback about the framework centered on understanding how the framework can be embraced by student affairs organizations and the field of student affairs. Practitioners agreed that the practicality discussed during the dialogue must be made clearer through propositional statements or hypotheses that can later be tested. Scholars were comfortable with the framework as a descriptive tool to help student affairs organizations and the field find ways to improve.

However, practitioners assert that a prescriptive approach would be more useful in their everyday work. One practitioner noted:

> *"Just try to make it so it's practical, and because if you're going to test it as you say you'd like to, you're going to have to have some hypotheses to test...because it will help to explain what you really have in mind... I just can't visualize how it would translate into practice and so if you were able to develop these hypotheses. Then it seems to me that it would give everybody that you talk to a better sense of what you would expect if this theory were tested and found to be true."*

To address this critique, the researcher provided a clearer context for why the framework was developed and how it can be used by both scholars and researchers in the field as well as leaders in student affairs divisions. In addition, the researcher sought a non-exhaustive list of strategies that could be employed "off the shelf" for practitioners looking for examples as to how to use the ideas contained in the conceptual framework. In addition, conceptual statements (originally called propositions) were added to provide a sense of what a student affairs learning organization would look like, but not a set of prescriptive tools disconnected from the diverse institutional cultures in which student affairs exists.

Participants also agreed that the constructs selected are appropriate to the stated purpose of the framework and represent the ethos and underlying philosophy of the student affairs profession. One participant indicated that he is unable to determine if any construct is missing, but thought the presentation of the framework would be beneficial to student affairs divisions and the student affairs profession and, *"that is seemed to capture the issues of the day."*

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Highlighting this sentiment, another participant commented, "*I think they're all good [the constructs] and probably should be integrated in ways that they haven't been before, but I can't I just can't visualize how it would translate into practice.*"

Overall, the narrative of the conceptual was received more than the initial visual presentation (see page 55). Critiques regarding the visual framework were diverse, but there are several themes that emerged across the interviews. Most participants thought that without the narrative, the visual presentation would have absolutely no context in which it could be useful. In addition, respondents indicated that the original visual framework was too busy and it is impossible to determine where it started and where it ended.

Only two participants, (one scholar and one practitioner) thought the original visual presentation of the framework adequately displayed the information contained in the accompanying narrative. Thus, the researcher clearly sees the need to dramatically revise the visual presentation of the conceptual framework.

While practitioners often critiqued the lack of prescriptive strategies and tools for creating the learning organization, one practitioner did note that the utility of a conceptual framework is the fact that it highlights relationships between construct that can be flexibly and creatively applied to the diversity of the institutions in which student organizations exist, as well as the diversity of the student affairs organizations themselves. This point harkens back to the challenge facing student affairs organizations in their ability to understand the culture in which they are situated and subsequently the ability to adapt to or influence the culture in ways that student learning and engagement are enhanced. This comment exemplified what the researcher was trying to express (although not always successfully) to the practitioners. But as a practitioner, the researcher appreciated and sought to mitigate the issues of prescription which

seem to emanate from the discussion. Table 11 provides a summary of the key comments provided by each participant group: scholars and practitioners.

Table 11: Key Comments by Participant Group

Key Comments	Scholars	Practitioners
A better description for the organizational learning construct will enhance the framework	x	x
The narrative clearly describes the propositions of the Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework		x
The visual presentations needs to better reflect the narrative describing the framework's propositions	x	x
More strategies and techniques are needed for creating a learning organization		x
Examples of student affairs learning organizations would be useful	x	x

5.5   A REVISED STUDENT AFFAIRS LEARNING ORGANIZATION

FRAMEWORK

5.5.1   Conceptual Statements

1. Student affairs divisions are, to the greatest extent, humanistic in their approach to student learning and development. They seek to help students develop meaning and purpose in their lives. These divisions also support and augment the experiences students gain in the classroom. Student learning is the guiding theoretical framework by which the profession practices. Therefore, the learning organization concept aligns with the ethos of the student affairs profession.

2. Student affairs divisions do not always function in institutions where learning is the core practice of everyone. However, student affairs divisions should transform into learning cultures and serve as models and facilitators of adult and life-long learning. It is the philosophy of the student affairs practice. Additionally, the calls for outcomes assessment, accountability, improved quality, etc. provide the external force for change. The concept of the Learning Organization posits a learning culture as a requisite for organizational quality improvement. Silo mentality and its subsequent practices exist in many student affairs organizations and are often based on the functional areas in student affairs such as residence life, student activities, counseling services, and career services, to name a few. These areas tend to develop a subculture based on specific practical

knowledge requisite for the work they entails. For example, members of a student activities office may extend their learning only to opportunities related to their sub-specialty such as program planning, marketing, student outreach, and event planning.

3. Since student affairs organizations represent an interdisciplinary set of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that can contribute to enhanced student learning and engagement, organizational learning strategies and knowledge management systems should be enhanced to improve these competencies for student affairs professionals. Organizational learning strategies can include comprehensive assessment programs, productive reflection, and evaluative inquiry. Knowledge management systems and structures should be framed with a social constructivist perspective. Both constructs impact an organization's capacity to create, re-appropriate, disseminate, and diffuse knowledge.

4. Student affairs organizations are not immune to the myriad of criticisms aimed at uncovering the value, the cost, and the contribution of higher education to individuals, organizations, and the greater society. Stakeholders want to use knowledge to inform their decisions Student affairs must adapt to the competitive drivers of knowledge management and also the internal benefit derived from organizational learning. Managing the knowledge created or incorporated through organizational learning activities improves the organization's ability to adapt in a knowledge-driven environment.

5. Communities of practice are the places where organizational learning activities occur. Members of the communities share a commitment to a knowledge domain and have created a culture that represents the values of their interests. Their work is informed by

the knowledge created and shared among a collective. Five communities of practice seem to permeate student affairs organizations and should be recognized by those attempting to create learning organizations. Cultures of communities of practice are the gatekeepers to improving quality.

6. Systemic leadership requires student affairs members to develop new ways of working that encourage the transformation required for student affairs divisions to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Leadership is diffused throughout the organization and is based on a systems perspective to examining organizational life. Systemic leadership requires new ways of relating to others, new ways of leading, new ways of influencing and new ways learning—all of which represents the kind of leadership that values the intrinsic worth of those within the organizations. The culture of the student affairs profession lends itself well to the systemic leadership construct.

5.5.2   Iterations of the Visual Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework

This section provides a visual display of the iterative process through which the conceptual framework changed through the research study. The transition to each diagram was driven primarily through the data collected through the interviews, but also the literature analysis that occurred throughout the research process as well as the researcher's reflections.

Figure 5 was developed after the first round of interviews when participants reviewed the initial draft of the framework. Participants agreed that original framework provided little direction as to what the Student Affairs Learning Organization was suppose to do—toward what end was this type of organization needed. Participants noted that the figure was too busy and did not fully express the complexity represented in the concept paper. Practitioners indicated that the

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first draft of the framework did not provide any actionable items, or a process for improving student affairs organizations. It was also noted that the use of Blimling's student affairs communities of practice were overly prescriptive and limited the kinds of communities that could emerge and be supported in student affairs organizations.

In response to these critiques, the researcher revised the framework to better reflect its conceptual intent. Arrows illustrating improved student learning outcomes and engagement opportunities were included and the proximal goals of improved student affairs functioning emanated from within communities of practice were listed. The researcher also added a directional component at the bottom of figure to demonstrate that a student affairs learning organization is continuously reflecting, taking action, and transforming. In addition, the researcher attempted to better integrate the constructs of the framework. Organizational learning was placed as the core activity occurring in communities of practice with knowledge management structures and systems surrounding the communities (to capture the knowledge being developed). The shape of the framework was added to demonstrate the fluid form of a 21st century student affairs division—able to respond to and influence its internal and external environments. These revisions supported the data from the interviews that indicated the draft framework did not clearly represent an interrelationship among the constructs. The researcher also removed the labels of the four communities of practice so as to not suggest that the four articulated by Blimling (2001) were the only communities of practice within student affairs organizations. This iteration was, as expected, the most dramatic change to the visual presentation of the conceptual framework because it was the first to be based not only the literature analysis, but also data from the panel of experts.

Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework
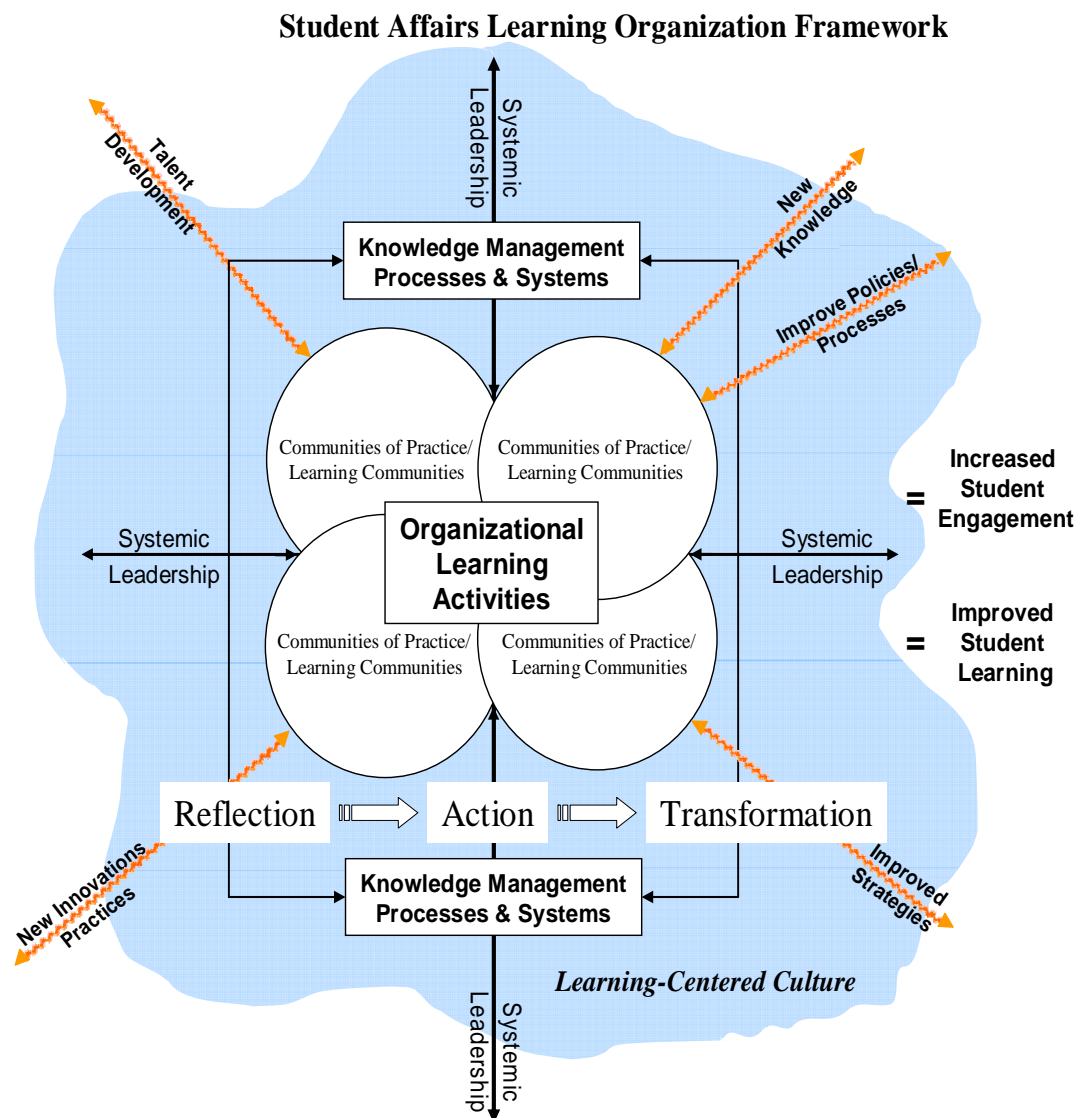
Figure 5: Visual Framework after First Round of Interviews

Figure 6 represents the revision to the framework during the second round of interviews. In this sense, the researcher tweaked the framework as interviews progressed and shared stages of the changes with the study participants. The attempt in this iteration was to demonstrate that a student affairs learning organization considers a balanced approach of organizational learning activities within communities of practices, which are surrounded by knowledge management systems and processes, which lead to improved organizational outcomes. For study participants,

this revision better demonstrated the processes and activities of a student affairs learning organization. One participant noted that it better reflected a path goal model, which makes it easier for audiences to see the "path" toward improved student learning and engagement opportunities.   It also represented the shift from transformational leadership to systemic leadership as the axis of all activities. Participants still perceived that the four circles in figure 6 were still prescriptive in nature and may suggest to some that there are only four communities of practice in student affairs divisions.
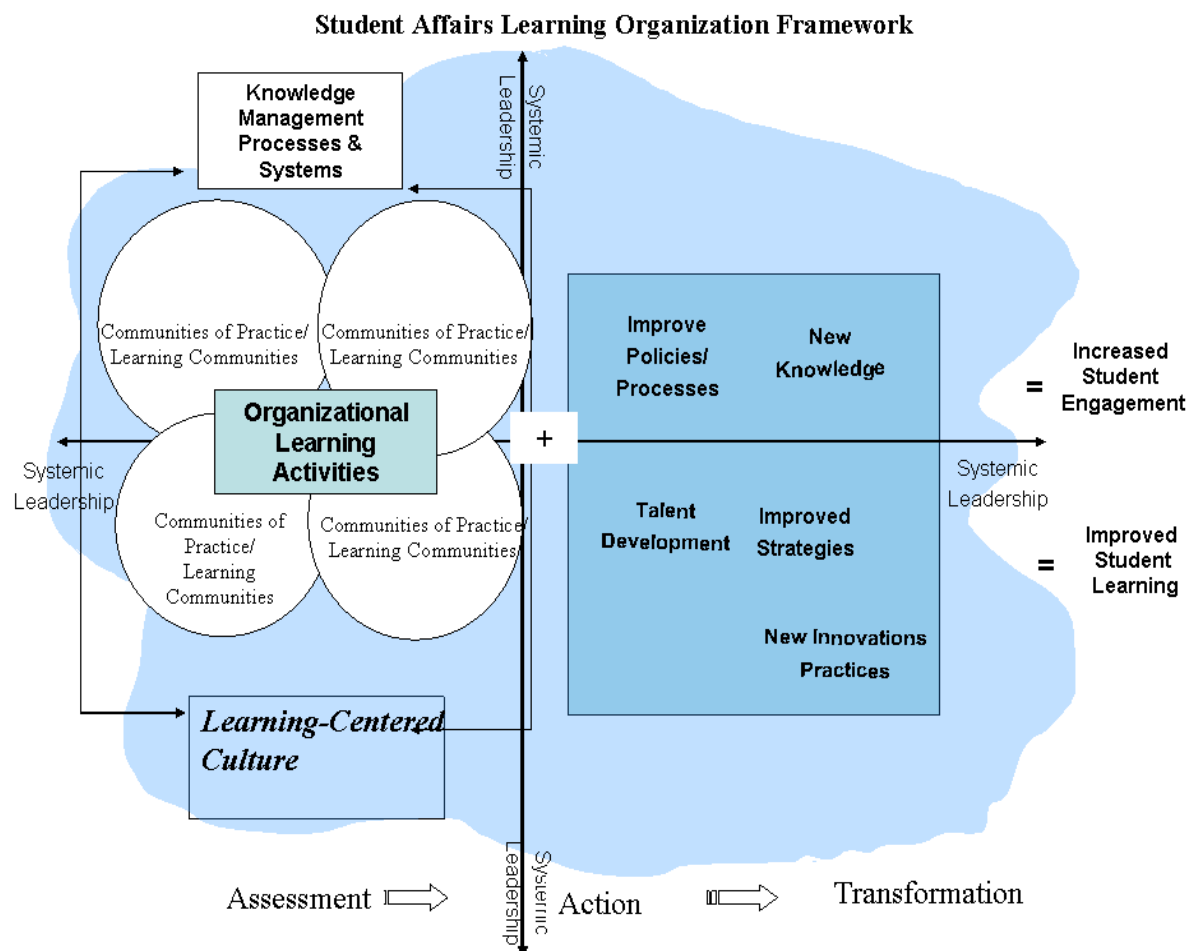
Figure 6: Visual Framework during the Second Round of Interviews and Further Literature Analysis

The iteration of the framework in Figure 7 occurred after the second round of interviews. It was during this time that the researcher was able to reflect on the critiques made to the framework, as well as the contextual information provided from questions one and two of the research study. For example, participants shared that a major challenge facing student affairs divisions was the lack of institutional and professional knowledge among student affairs professionals. In previous iterations of the framework, results of organizational learning activities automatically were captured within knowledge management systems and structures. This iteration also incorporated data that suggested knowledge management systems and structures lead to outcomes on the right side of the plus symbol. In Figure 7, the researcher attempted to reflect that results from organizational learning activities needed to be strategically added into knowledge management systems and structures to yield desirable outcomes. The researcher also played with the positioning of some of the organizational outcomes to reduce the appearance of linearity with the kinds of outcomes that could result. A noted suggestion was to simply have one symbol to represent any number of communities of practice.

Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework
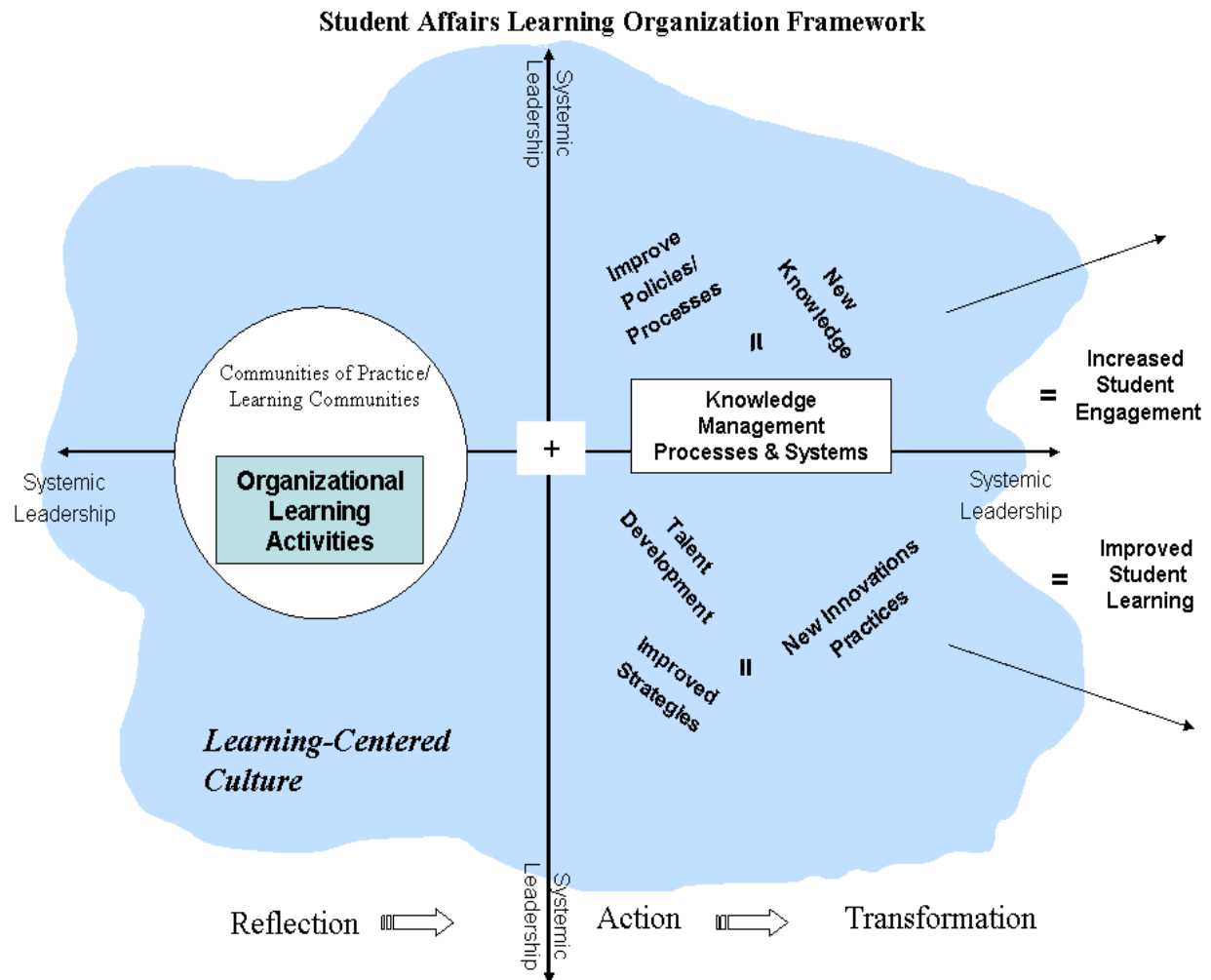
Figure 7: Visual Framework after the Second Round of Interviews

The framework in Figure 8 was only a slight revision of Figure 7. The framework was revised during the writing of the results and analysis section of this dissertation. This iteration includes productive reflection, assessment, and evaluative inquiry as key organizational learning activities. These activities were included to support the data purporting that more strategies should in the framework could increase it's practicality among student affairs practitioners.

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Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework
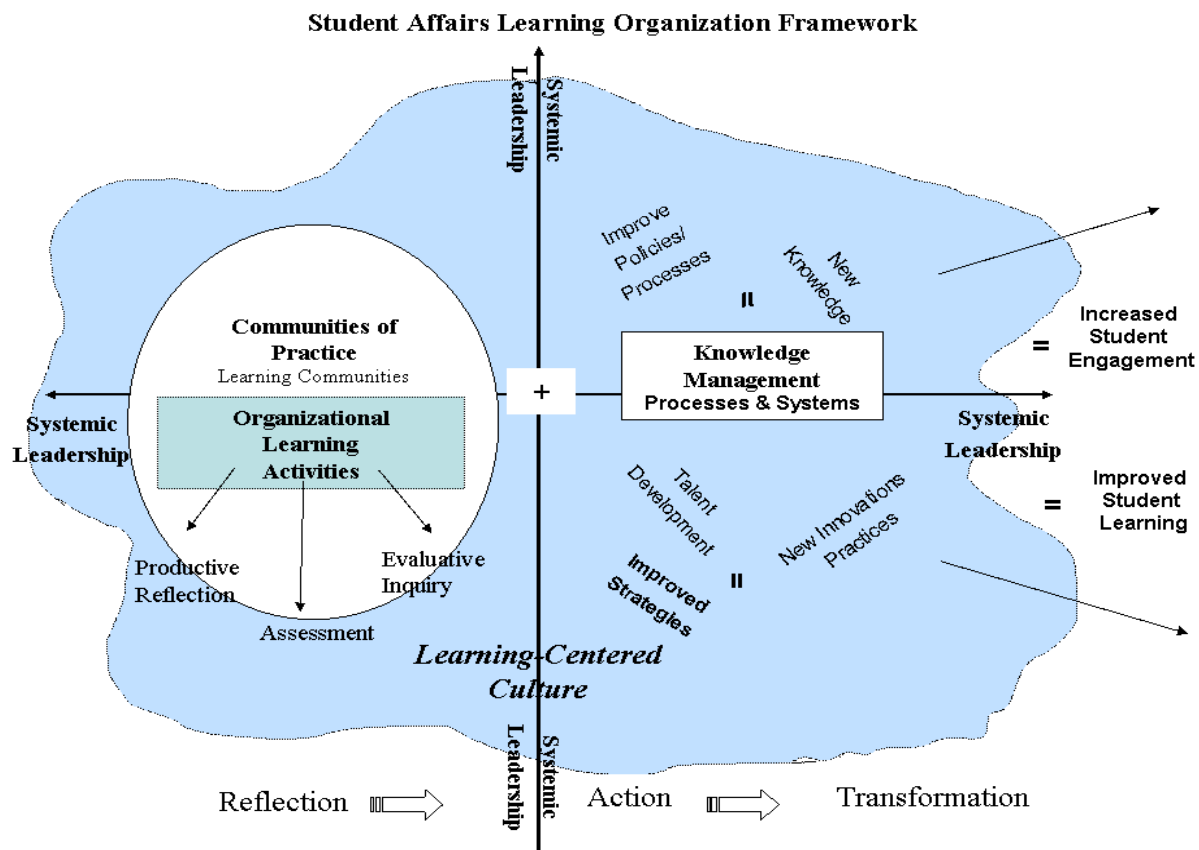
Figure 8: Visual Presentation after the Interviews and Literature Analysis

Table 12 provides a summary of the final changes made to the draft of the original

framework:

Table 12: Comparison of Draft Framework to Changes Made to the Revised Framework

Draft Framework	Revised Framework
Circle representing the learning organization culture	The culture of the framework is represented by a fluid, reflexive diagram
Four labeled circles represented communities of practice	One circle representing any number of communities of practice
Transformational leadership was included as a construct	Systemic leadership replaced transformational leadership
No description of organizational learning activities	Three specific organizational learning activities are identified.
No clear path articulating the goal of purpose of the framework	Framework represents a more path goal model for understanding the ends toward which the framework support

6.0   CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND OVERALL SUMMARY

The intent of this study is to contribute to higher education management literature by proffering and validating a conceptual framework that can be used as a humanistic and socially constructed approach to understanding and pursuing organizational quality improvement particularly in student affairs organizations. The proximal goal is to improve how student affairs organizations function through its activities, practices, policies, and procedures employed by student affairs professionals. The assumption is that improving student affairs divisions will contribute to improved student engagement and learning opportunities, the distal goal. This chapter summarizes the answers to the research questions in the context of the evolving Student Affairs Learning Organization framework, discusses the limitations and delimitations of the study, shares lessons learned, and offers recommendations and implications for future research.

6.1   ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

6.1.1   Challenges Facing Student Affairs and an Estimation of High Quality Student Affairs Organization

This study was comprised of one overarching research question and five related sub-questions. The first two related questions (what are the challenges facing student affairs organizations and

what is quality in the context of student affairs organizations?) served as a foundation for the study, as well as provided a context for understanding how and why a conceptual framework for organizational improvement was necessary for student affairs organizations. During the literature analysis, these questions guided the direction of the research and led to insights that the researcher questioned and checked during the Delphi process.

The researcher also used these questions during the Delphi process to allow the participants to share assumptions, beliefs, and values related to the challenges of student affairs organizations as well as the attributes that would determine a high quality student affairs division. As the process evolved, it was clear that the questions were interdependent— suggesting that a high quality student affairs division is one that effectively addresses the challenges that student affairs divisions face. The responses to these questions guided the revisions to the framework, such that the researcher sought to ensure that the challenges facing 21st century student affairs divisions were addressable by the learning organization framework and that the attributes of a high quality student affairs organization could also emanate from a student affairs learning organization.

The responses to these two interview questions, in concert with the comparative analysis with the literature, led to four themes representing the challenges of student affairs. The themes included: developing a professional identity, aligning diverging interests, developing a global approach to practice, and understanding a changing student culture.

Developing a professional identity entails student affairs professionals surfacing mental models that trap them in silo mentality. Silo mentality prevents organizational members from productive reflection, assessment, and evaluative inquiry activities that lead to individual learning and organizational learning. The lack of institutional and professional knowledge results in role ambiguity and the inability to effectively meet the needs of stakeholders.

Organizational learning activities could alleviate this lack of knowledge, particularly when knowledge is being intentionally acquired, shared, developed, and dispersed within and among communities of practice. In addition, the more student affairs professionals engage in systemic leadership, the more likely they are to develop a professional identity. They are engaging in new ways of learning, leading, relating, and influencing those with whom they engage in social interactions.

Aligning diverging interests (assessment and accountability) was a second conceptual category of challenges because the calls for accountability by stakeholders may or may not focus on improving student learning and development—the espoused role of the student affairs profession. The revised learning organization framework addresses this challenge in that it seeks to provide a foundation for micro- (organizational) and macro-level (student learning and development) improvement. In addition, the framework provides a template for the organization to develop grounded solutions to address the inevitable conflicts of diverging interests. Since these outcomes can manifest themselves differently across campus, a prescriptive set of tools may be ineffective.

Understanding the changing the student culture was the third category that that emerged during the research study. The salient themes included technology and student consumerism. Both of these challenges are addressable the learning organizations framework because learning and learning how to learn are the key activities and competencies needed to address this ever-changing reality. Developing a global perspective to practice was another challenge comprising the salient themes of diversity and cultural competence. Results of the study revealed that in order for student affairs divisions to confront the challenges of 21st century organizations, they must tend to issues of changing student demographics and student affairs professionals entering the field requires a commitment to enhancing the cultural competency of both students and

student affairs professionals, all of whom must work and live in a global society. Again, the framework proffered in this study provides student affairs professionals a language around which a dialogue about diversity and cultural competency can occur in meaningful ways, appropriate for the culture in which the division exists.

In terms of a high quality student affairs organization, the study results demonstrated that effectively responding to the aforementioned challenges will contribute to a high quality student affairs organization. In addition, study participants indicated that an environment conducive to taking risks, as well as addressing knowledge gaps in student leaning and development, the culture of the student affairs profession, institutional culture and politics, and the internal and external environment in which the institution exists would contribute to a high quality student affairs organization. This framework is useful in that "quality" is a socially constructed concept that means different things to different people. The framework presented allows flexibility in how student affairs divisions seek to improve the quality of their organizations and the student learning and development opportunities offered. It provides a conceptual foundation upon which many strategies and techniques can be used more effectively and not as off the shelf, fly by night, faddish attempts at compliance.

6.1.2   Developing the Conceptual Framework

The Student Affairs Learning Organization framework was developed through an iterative process in which the researcher mined four discourses: student affairs, the leaning organization, organization culture and leadership and quality management. The initial literature analysis led to the draft of framework. Realizing that this draft framework was a construction of knowledge based on the values, assumptions, and beliefs of the researcher, this study sought to validate the

draft framework using a modified Delphi process which entailed interviewing an expert panel of higher education scholars and practitioners. The constructs of framework included organizational learning, knowledge management, communities of practice, and transformational leadership. These constructs emerged based on several factors. The first factor considered the constructs prevalence among the four areas of literature. For example, organizational leaning was often used interchangeably with the larger learning organization concept. Organizational learning in this study was viewed as a social process in which individuals in interactions with other constructing and reconstituted knowledge based on data and information and combined with experience and judgment. Another factor for inclusion in the framework considered the constructs' inclusion in the contemporary approaches to improving higher education quality. For example, knowledge management processes and activities are discussed in the discourse on TQM as an essential activity for addressing issues in organizations. Lastly, these constructs emerged because of the researchers epistemological assumptions about organizational life and the role of humans as participants in systems. Chapter 5 provided in-depth exploration of how the framework changed throughout the research process.

6.1.3   Improving Organizational Quality with the Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework: What are the Framework's Implications for Student Affairs practice?

The goal of this research study is to provide a conceptually grounded, yet practical framework for examining organizational improvement in higher education. The intention of the researcher has always been to advance the dialogue within higher and student affairs that has been occurring outside of higher education and student affairs. The Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework was created as a result of an extensive literature analysis and critiqued

by experts. The semi-structured protocol specifically queried experts about how the framework could be practical. While interviewing the participants, the researcher realized that "practicality" was a term not well understood by most practitioners. Practicality suggests that the framework creates the possibility of multiple solutions to address the challenges that organizations confront.

The practitioners in the study sought techniques for creating the learning organization. In an effort to address this real need, the research directed participants to a number of sources that offer prescriptive techniques for improving student affairs divisions. However, the researcher's deliberate decision to engage in dialogue with the participants led not only to the identification of strategies already in the student affairs discourse including the Malcolm Baldridge Award criteria in Education, CAS standards, AQUIP guidelines, Senge's five disciplines (elaborated on and enhanced in a revised edition of the Learning Organization, 2007) and other carefully constructed strategies, but also the notion that strategies of today will not likely be the strategies for tomorrow and that this awareness will serve organizations and their members much better in future.

After the second round of the Delphi process, participants agreed that the framework was practical, but could be enhanced with several complimentary activities. Both scholars and practitioners provided examples of how they have or would to create a learning organization. Below are some of those examples:

- Division-wide teams that focus on assessment, marketing, student leadership development, etc.;

- Book clubs that focus on professional and personal interests and that are led by student affairs staff;

- Divisional anthems and mission statements which reflect the needs of all those in the community (not just students);

- Support for diverse communities of professionals that emerge; and

- Dialogue concerning deeply held personal values and assumptions, as well those important to the organization.

Thus, the work in this study—the development, validation, and revision of the Student Affairs Learning Organization framework is practical for improving student affairs divisions from at least two perspectives. First, it provides a foundation for advancing dialogue in student affairs organizations and higher education about why improving student affairs organizations is needed given the changing societal landscape. Second, it provides conceptual foundation for the many prescriptions aimed at proving higher education and student affairs. In this way, divisions that employ various strategies and techniques for improvement will have a more grounded understanding of the strategy or technique, make better informed decisions based on this understanding, and choose strategies that are aligned with the organization's culture.

For example, a Vice President or Dean of Student Affairs might use the framework as an assessment tool to discuss the processes, activities, and practices occurring within the organization as well as how these tools might be enhanced by a new perspective for thinking about the division. The framework can be used as a point of departure for discussing how the organization might engage the higher education community in dialogue and action toward enhancing student learning and development opportunities. Staff members might discuss ways in which their units are or are not engaged in organizational learning activities and how the knowledge developed from these activities could be shared throughout their units. The framework might also be used in strategic planning sessions in which student affairs divisions map current process, activities, and practices onto the framework and identify areas in which they can further develop (for example, supporting emerging communities of practice, or introducing productive reflection to their staff members). Further research can explore how

student affairs professionals engage in these dialogues and how they can use the framework to guide and transform the cultures of the organizations.

Given the challenges of student affairs organizations, becoming a learning organization could potentially reposition these divisions to central partners working toward the educational mission of the institution. Student affairs learning organizations can serve as guide posts for other organizations within the higher education community.   While these examples serve as implications for student affairs practice, it is important to note the limitations and delimitations of the framework and the study. These are addressed in the following section.

6.2   LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

> When we answer some questions, we raise others. And no matter how
> well thought out we thing our project is at the beginning, there always are
> those unanticipated twists and turns along the way that lead us to rethink
> our positions and question our methods and to let us now that we are not
> as smart as we think are. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.55).

This study may be limited in the fact the researcher used 14 participants, so the findings concerning the validity of the framework should be continuously explored by other experts and within actual student affairs organizations. Using other subsets of experts in the disciplines of inquiry will also contribute to a richer understanding of how the framework could be used not only within student affairs, but within others areas of higher education. In addition, this study employed elements of grounded theory methodology.   Although contemporary grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2006) assert that the methodology has evolved since the writings of Glaser

and Strauss (1967), this study employed the elements most appropriate for the goal of the research. Thus, this study does not purport a grand or formal theory of organizational improvement. The study is also limited because while the assumptions of the researcher have been made explicit, these assumptions inherently framed the direction of the research study including the literatures explored, the methods used, and the interpretations of study participants' responses and conclusions that have been drawn. The researcher did mitigate this limitation by articulating the assumptions in a way that readers will have solid understanding from which to make their own conclusions about the research findings.

Another study limitation, mitigated slightly after the first round of interviews, could have been the intellectual frontloading required by participants. Participants were asked to read a 15 - page concept paper that outlined the framework's constructs, its propositions for student affairs, as well as a visual diagram. The Delphi process was conducted during the summer, which could have made it easier for practitioners given the typical summer downtime, but soliciting and maintaining participants was challenging because many prospective participants and actual participants scheduled vacations during the summer, which resulted in the lost of two participants. Lastly, and supporting Smyth's (2004) contention, conceptual frameworks are socially constructed diagrams that are developed within and from the researcher's life experiences and assumptions. Thus, while it appears that examining student affairs divisions from this perspective is aligned with the changing culture of society, human populations, and changing student demographics--the future sustainability of student affairs organizations and higher education institutions could require a different framework or approach to organizational improvement. Hopefully, higher education and student affairs will be a generative force in the determining that reality and are not left scrambling to react to it.

This study has been delimited to studying student affairs divisions, which is only one of many organizations within higher education institutions (the rationale for this selection was discussed in Chapter Two). It has also been delimited through the use of a purposive sampling of experts using a modified Delphi process. The researcher reviewed the scholarly literature, sought recommendations, and benchmarked student affairs divisions and professionals to determine the list of experts considered for participation in the study.

6.3   IMPLICATIONS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

There are a few recommendations for further study based on the findings of this research. The Student Affairs Learning Organization framework developed in this study should be applied in student affairs organizations to further test its validity and practicality in an organizational setting. Case studies of current student affairs organizations that exemplify the constructs in the framework and their proposed relationships should be disseminated throughout the student affairs discourse for further scrutiny and validation. For example, Oregon State University has been recognized for its work in organizational improvement for a myriad of activities—most notably its learning-orientated approach to assessment. South Carolina State University also fosters a culture that emphasizes organizational learning and knowledge management processes as it relates to interdisciplinary research on organizational and quality improvement.

Further research, particularly using the process of concept mapping, may be useful in mapping current strategies and procedures onto the conceptual framework—further aiding conceptual understanding of organizational improvement and how current prescriptive strategies may fare in light of a learning-orientated culture. For example, divisions could map accreditation

guidelines or the CAS standards onto the various constructs of the framework in order to frame the guidelines and standards in the context of assessment activities, the kinds of knowledge management structures developed, the systemic diffusion of the guidelines and standards, etc. Doing so, will provide alternative perspectives for understanding how already established prescriptions for organizational improvement can be effectively used in a student affairs context to yield improvements not only in the division, but also in student learning and engagement outcomes.

6.4   CONCLUDING PERSONAL THOUGHTS

Dialoguing with scholars and practitioners was an extremely beneficial learning experience for the researcher, their feedback and comments pushed the researcher's learning and thinking about all aspects of the research study. More specifically, this dialogue allowed the researcher to gain external feedback about a number of concepts and ideas that have emerged throughout the researcher's tenure in higher education and student affairs. Expert validation of the framework led to improved definitions, descriptions, and proposed relationships among the four constructs. They were also truly grounded in the work of student affairs. For example, the introduction of the systemic leadership construct represented the essence of social learning and knowledge development. It also represented how dialogue leads to deeper insights more appropriate to the context in question (student affairs). The revisions to the framework occurred within a discursive process. Participants requested to see iterations of the unfolding diagrams, which led to the revised framework presented in this study.

Most importantly, the researcher learned that the complexity and organic nature of organizational life renders any one "approach" (to making them better) limiting, especially if human agency is truly considered. This suggests that any approach to improving organizations must carefully tend to and consider the learning and developmental needs of organizational members and the sheer free will that comes with being human. Otherwise polices, procedures, and activities may never reach their fullest potential in achieving organizational outcomes.

APPENDIX A: DELPHI STUDY PARTICIPANTS[2]

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[2] Biographical information was taken from various internet Web sites.

Dr. Adrianna Kezar- University of Southern California

Adrianna Kezar is an Associate Professor for Higher Education. Dr. Kezar earned a Ph.D. 1996, a M.A. 1992 in higher education administration from the University of Michigan, and a B.A. 1989 from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Kezar previously directed George Washington University's ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, was formerly the associate director for the same program, and also served as the coordinator for the Higher Education Program at George Washington University. She was also co-director for the George Washington University Center for Educational Leadership and Transformation and a student affairs associate at the University of Michigan.

Kezar is the author of Understanding and Facilitating Organizational Change in the 21st Century: Recent Research and Conceptualizations (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports, 2001) and co-author of Taking the Reins: Institutional Transformation in Higher Education (ACE-ORYX Press, 2002). She has also edited five books.

Kezar is the principal investigator for a $2.25 million Department of Education grant to develop a national database of higher education literature resources, edit a publication series, and develop and maintain a Web site of educational resources. She is also the editor of the ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report Series.

Dr. Kathy Humphrey-University of Pittsburgh

Kathy Humphrey is the Vice Provost and Dean of Students at the University of Pittsburgh where she oversees all student affairs functional areas. Dr. Humphrey earned a B.S. in Education at Central Missouri State University, a M.A. in Higher Education Administration at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration at Saint Louis University.

As Vice President for Student Development at Saint Louis University, Dr. Humphrey served as the chief student affairs officer on the President's Coordinating Council, developed living and learning housing options, increased occasions for students to positively interact with others in the university community, and initiated First Year and Sophomore Year Experience programs. Many of her activities involved creating seamless learning opportunities for students.

Dr. Dennis Roberts-Miami University of Ohio

Dr. Dennis Roberts is currently the Associate Vice-President of Student Affairs. He provides supervision and leadership to the Cliff Alexander Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life and Leadership, Career Services, Community Engagement & Service, Student Activities & Leadership and the newly formed Harry T. Wilks Leadership Institute.

He previously served Lynchburg College in Virginia as Dean of Students (1988-1994) and Southern Methodist University as Associate Dean of Students and Director of Residence Life (1979-1988). He holds a Ph.D. in Counseling and Personnel Services with a specialty in College

Student Personnel from the University of Maryland, a M.Ed. in College Student Personnel Administration, and a B.A. from Colorado State University.

Dr. Roberts has been recognized as a 1990 ACPA Annuit Coeptis Senior Leading Professional, a 1999 75th Anniversary Diamond Honoree, and a 2005 Senior Scholar. In 2006, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) bestowed the Esther Lloyd Jones Professional Service Award on Dr. Roberts for sustained commitment and service to student affairs work.

Dr. Dennis Pruitt-University of South Carolina

Dr. Dennis Pruitt has led the university's Division of Student Affairs since 1983, and during his tenure, he's guided the division through an unprecedented period of growth and success. He designed the University of South Carolina's award-winning enrollment management model, developed what is widely regarded as one of the earliest and most thorough strategic-planning processes in the field and significantly enhanced the university's student-service programs. Pruitt's numerous awards include the Outstanding Pillars of the Profession award from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), NASPA's Bob E. Leach Award for Dedicated and Outstanding Service to Students and the Armstrong State College Distinguished Alumni Award. Dr. Pruitt earned his Ed.D. from South Carolina, his master's degree in counseling/student personnel services from West Georgia College and his bachelor's degree in history and political science from Armstrong Atlantic State University (formerly Armstrong State College).

Dr. Kathleen Manning

Dr. Kathleen Manning, an Associate Professor, has taught at the University of Vermont since 1989 in the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) graduate program. Since 1997, she has been the coordinator of the HESA program. In 1992, she received the Kroepsch-Maurice Award for Teaching Excellence, a University-wide teaching award. During the spring 2003 and summer of 2004, she was a Fulbright Fellow at Beijing Normal University in China.

Dr. Manning conducts research and writes in the areas of organizational theory, qualitative research methodology and cultural pluralism. Published books include *Research in the College Contexts: Approaches and Methods* (2004, co-edited with Frances K. Stage), *Rituals, Ceremonies and Cultural Meaning in Higher* Education (2000), Giving *Voice to Critical Campus Issues: Qualitative research in student affairs* (2000), and *Enhancing the Multicultural Campus Environment* (1992, co-authored with Frances K. Stage). Dr. Manning has a Ph.D. in higher education with a minor in anthropology from Indiana University; a M.S. and Ed.S. in counseling and student personnel services from the State University of New York at Albany; and a B.A. in biology from Marist College. She is an avid sailor and enjoys skiing and other outdoor activities

Dr. John Schuh- Iowa State University, Ames

Dr. John H. Schuh is distinguished professor of educational leadership at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa and Interim Director of the Research Institute for Studies in Education. He was department chair from August 1998 to June 30, 2005. Previously he held administrative and faculty assignments at Wichita State University, Indiana University (Bloomington) and Arizona State University. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in history from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, and his Master of Counseling and Ph.D. degrees from Arizona State.

Dr. Schuh is the author, co-author or editor of over 235 publications, including 24 books and monographs, and over 60 book chapters, and 110 articles. His most recent books are *One Size Does Not Fit All: Traditional and Innovative Models of Student Affairs Practice* (with Kathleen Manning and Jillian Kinzie), *Student Success in College* (with George D. Kuh, Jillian Kinzie and Elizabeth Whitt) and *Promoting Reasonable Expectations* (with Thomas E. Miller and Barbara E. Bender). He is author or co-author of *The Life Cycle of the Department Chair* (co-edited with Walt Gmelch) and *Contemporary Financial Issues in Student Affairs* , *Foundations of Student Affairs Practice* (with Florence A. Hamrick and Nancy J. Evans), *Involving Colleges* (with George Kuh, Elizabeth Whitt and Associates), *Assessment Practice in Student Affairs* and *Assessment in Student Affairs* (both with M. Lee Upcraft), and *Creating Successful Partnerships between Academic and Student Affairs* (co-edited with Elizabeth Whitt).

Currently he is editor in chief of the *New Directions for Student Services* Sourcebook Series and is associate editor of the *Journal of College Student Development.* He has served as Editor and Chair of the ACPA Media Board, and was a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of College Student Development.* Schuh has made over 250 presentations and speeches to campus-based, regional and national meetings. He has served as a consultant to over 70 colleges, universities, and other organizations.

Dr. Trudy Banta- Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

Dr. Banta is a professor of Higher Education and Senior Advisor to the Chancellor for Academic Planning and Evaluation. She earned B.A. in Education (Biology and History in Secondary Education), and a M.A. in Counseling from the University of Kentucky as well as an Ed.D.in Educational Psychology (Minors: Psychology and Educational Administration) from University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Dr. Banta is the recipient of seven national awards for her work, Dr. Banta has consulted with faculty and administrators in 46 states, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates on the topic of outcomes assessment and has given invited addresses on this topic at national conferences in Canada, China, France, Germany, Spain and Scotland. She has developed and coordinated 21 national assessment conferences in the U.S. and 15 international conferences held in Australia, Austria, England, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Scotland, South Africa, and the United States.

Banta has written or edited 15 published volumes on assessment, contributed 26 chapters to other published works, and written more than 200 articles and reports. She is the founding editor of **Assessment Update**, a bi-monthly periodical published since 1989 by Jossey-Bass and winner of a national award for overall excellence in 2003.

Dr. James Anderson-University at Albany

Dr. Anderson was the vice president for student success and vice provost for institutional assessment and diversity Anderson's research and publications have focused on the development of student learning styles across gender, race, culture and class; the formal assessment of student learning in the college classroom; and the examination of how diversity impacts student learning, retention, and overall institutional effectiveness. He was selected as an American Council on Education (ACE) Fellow, a Danforth Fellow and a National Learning Communities Fellow. In March 2005, Anderson was awarded the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Outstanding Contribution to Higher Education Award, and in November 2004 was honored by the National Association of Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) Commission on Human Resources and Social Changes with an Outstanding Service award.

From 1992 to 2003, Dr. Anderson served as the vice provost for undergraduate affairs at North Carolina State University. He has also served on the psychology faculty at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Xavier University of New Orleans. At Xavier he also served as the department chair. He obtained a bachelor's degree from Villanova University and his doctorate in psychology from Cornell University.

Dr. Julie Wong-University of Texas at El Paso

Dr. Wong has spent over 18 years working in higher education at various universities. Prior to assuming her current position at UTEP, she served as the founding Dean of Students at the University of California San Diego, Sixth College and as the Associate Dean for Campus Life and Director of Student Activities at Chapman University. Her career in Student Affairs began in Residence Life at the University of California Berkeley and California State University, Los Angeles.

Dr. Wong also served as a teaching assistant in the School of Education at the University of Southern California for the Politics of Difference, Restructuring the Academy and Organizational Theory & Policy.

Dr. Wong earned a Bachelors degree in Recreation and Leisure Studies, a M.A. in College & University Administration, and a Ph.D. in Organizational Planning and Administration.

Dr. Larry Roper-Oregon State University

Dr. Roper serves as vice provost for Student Affairs. He also teaches courses in the Community College Leadership and College Student Services Administration programs. He has degrees from Heidelberg College, Bowling Green State University, and the University of Maryland.

Dr. Roper currently serves as a senior scholar with the American College Personnel Association and editor of the Journal of the National Association of Student Personal Administrators. He is also the principal investigator and project director for a Kellogg Foundation grant for the Leadership for Institutional Change in Higher Education Initiative.

As vice provost for Student Affairs reports to the provost/executive vice president and serves as a member of the executive leadership team of the president. The vice provost collaborates with others to develop and implement policies concerning student and general university programs and create a network to resolve problems and issues confronting students and staff. The vice provost represents student services throughout the university and community.

A significant part of the vice provost position involves developing relationships and creating networks that will enhance the quality of life for students. The vice provost has responsibility for working with students, faculty, and staff to promote the development of a positive campus environment. Because of the wide diversity among the units within Student Affairs, the vice provost provides leadership to create coherence among the various services and initiatives. These responsibilities imply the development of a strong and dynamic leadership team.

Kim Yousey-New York University

Kimberly Yousey is the Director of Research and Assessment for the Division of Student Affairs at New York University. In addition she serves as adjunct faculty for the Higher Education program at New York University and is Vice Chair for Assessment Education for the Commission on the Assessment and Evaluation for College Student Educators International (ACPA). She received her PhD. from NYU in Higher Education, a Masters of Education (MEd) from Kent State University in College Student Personnel and a Bachelors of Music Education (BME) from Baldwin-Wallace College.

Prior to focusing specifically on assessment, Dr. Yousey has worked in several areas of students affairs including serving as a Hall Director, Residence Hall Manager, Community Development Educator, Director of Student Activities, Assistant Director of Residence Life, Academic Advisor and Director of the College Learning Center. Her primary research interests lie in assessment education and outreach, community development, learning communities, learning theories and organizational culture.

Linda Deanna-University of Illinois-Chicago

Linda Deanna is the Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs/Dean of Students at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She has held various student affairs positions including Ombudsperson, Complex Coordinator, Student Affairs Coordinator, and Director of Housing. She received her Bachelors' degree from University of Detroit-Mercy, her Master's from the University of Southern California, and her doctorate from Loyola University Chicago. She is an active member of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Marilee Bresciani, Ph.D. - San Diego State University

Marilee Bresciani is an Associate Professor of Postsecondary Education Leadership at San Diego State University, where she coordinates the masters in Student Affairs/Services in community colleges and higher education, the certificate in institutional research, planning, and assessment, and the masters and doctorate in community college leadership.

Dr. Bresciani's research focuses on the evaluation of student learning and development. She uses grounded theory to explore how systems and processes contribute to student learning centeredness, which includes the study of leaders' roles in these systems and processes.

Dr. Bresciani has held faculty and higher education administration positions for over 20 years. In those positions, she has conducted enrollment management research, quantitative and qualitative institutional research, course-embedded assessment, and academic and administrative program assessment. Previously as Assistant Vice President for Institutional Assessment at Texas A&M University and as Director of Assessment at North Carolina State University, Dr. Bresciani led university-wide initiatives to embed faculty-driven outcomes-based assessment in the curriculum. She has led reforms in outcomes-based assessment program review, assessment of general education, quality enhancement, and assessment of the co-curricular. Dr. Bresciani holds a Ph.D. in Administration, Curriculum, and Instruction from the University of Nebraska and a Masters of Arts in Teaching from Hastings College.

APPENDIX B: **RESULTS OF THE FACE VALIDITY TEST**

Student Affairs Divisions as Learning Organizations:

Toward a Conceptual Framework for Organizational Quality Improvement

Results from Pilot Study

The researcher selects a four-person panel to review the study protocol to elicit feedback that would improve the protocol before it is used in the full research study. Audio-taped interviews yield answers and comments to the following questions:

1. Is the format of the conceptual framework transparent and easy to understand?
    - All but one interviewee indicate that the format of the concept paper is easy to understand. One indicates that it is very dense, but that it is his issue, as he waited to read it in an afternoon setting (not a good time for him to read). They all indicate that the layout flows well.
    - One interview indicates that the table on page 7 leads him to believe that the following text would discuss the table. He suggests adding a second table that introduces the constructs or includes the constructs in the existing table. It is slightly distracting and leads him away from the focus of the document, yielding many questions. After some clarification in the conversation, his questions become unnecessary.

    Researcher Comments: The layout and presentation of the framework works. The researcher needs to tweak the concept paper to add a little more background to the constructs section. The researcher should also revise the table on page 7 to include how the constructs are derived from the streams of literature (See concept paper page 7).

2. Does the framework provide enough information for an adequate critique?
    - All respondents indicate that there is adequate information to critique the framework, but an uniformed reader could use more background on each construct and why these constructs were selected. One interviewee indicates that the propositions need to better explain the relationships among the constructs (although this is what the formal study will elicit as well).

    Researcher Comments: The respondents suggest that critiquing the framework is slightly challenging in that the constructs represent things to which all organizations should strive. The constructs make sense and the relationships among the constructs work well. For the practitioners, they want to direct their attention to how the framework can be applied in practice. During the conversations, the researcher engages the respondents in questions that naturally flow from the conversation. The scholar respondent is a previous advisor to the researcher and spends

the most time answering questions related to the overall study and providing very detailed feedback on the protocol. The practitioner respondents are more prepared to answer questions about applicability, usability, and strategies which may be helpful in assisting student affairs organizations improve based on the framework.

- o One interviewee indicates that some of the terms should be explained (humanistic) and that a few sentences should be devoted to explaining the distinctions between organizational learning and the learning organization.
3. Do the semi-structured interview questions provide enough guidelines for study participants to respond?
   - o One interviewee indicates that the current base code demographic questions are not necessary as all participants are now either student affairs scholars or practitioners.
   - o All respondents indicate yes, the questions are almost too structured.

Researcher Comments: The respondents think that the questions regarding the framework are appropriate. The researcher believes that the questions about strategies will yield richer data from the practitioners but may not as much from scholars. The scholars will provide richer data about the conceptual framework and the constructs. Base code data that would be appropriate for the study include: years in the profession, professional orientation, areas of research interest, size of staff, previous administrative background, and formal educational background. The scholars are engaged in the conversation about the appropriateness of the constructs. Communities of Practices yield the most discussion for all respondents.

4. Are there other questions that you think should be added or deleted?
   - o Interviewees suggest that the overall question should lend itself to conversation and critiques of the framework. The probing questions could be useful if no meaningful dialogue occurs when the overall question is asked. Respondents suggest that the probing questions may be to "deep" if they do not know the questions before hand, and that they may distract the respondent from his or her natural flow of responding and commenting on the framework.
   - o One major question should address strategies for operationalizing and applying the framework in practice.
   - o Questions should be directed toward either practitioners or scholars for comparative analyses.
5. How might you respond to the interview questions?
   - o One interviewee (the scholar) provides a lot of detailed, substantive critiques of the framework. He states that probing questions number 3 and 4 under question 1 are not useful or necessary.
   - o Three interviewees indicate that probing question 4 under question 1 is difficult to answer. They would not know how to answer the question
   - o All four interviewees provide suggestions for how to modify the figure of the framework including what constructs to emphasize and where to place the "learning culture" labels. All the respondents think it explains a complex phenomenon and is easy to understand after they read the concept paper.

Researcher's unstructured questions:

- How would define a quality student affairs organization?
- Do you feel that a learning culture is a pre-requisite to improving the quality of student affairs organizations?
- What do you believe are the challenges facing student affairs organizations?
- Do you think the Learning Organization Framework is operational?
- How would you operationalize the learning organization framework?
- What are some challenges facing the use of the learning organization framework?
- How did the construct change or challenge your thinking in terms of improving student affairs organizations?

Researcher Comments: These questions should become part of the protocol as the respondents feel comfortable when direct questions are asked. These questions lead to rich data concerning how the constructs can be employed in the organizations and how the constructs in the framework relate to others.

Overall Interview Highlights

6. Do you have any other suggestions or comments for improving the study's protocol?
    - Respondents indicate that the conceptual framework is very interesting and needed in higher education and student affairs. All respondents think the study is relevant and timely for student affairs organizations.

Researcher Comments:

- Provide more background about the basic researcher assumptions so that an uniformed reader can better understand the impetus for developing the framework (place the framework in context).
- Think more about the communities of practice. The four outlined found in the framework may be two prescribed for even modified grounded theory research.
- Collapse the frameworks propositions into statements that include the student affairs focus. Do not have broad propositions and then try to tie in student affairs examples.
- Create a box to illustrate the connection between the literatures and the subsequent constructs.
- Include the unstructured questions in the formal protocol so that all respondents are asked these particular questions.
- Remove base code data questions as all of the participants are student affairs practitioners. Change the base code questions related to years of experience, etc.
- Remove question 4 "How is quality embedded in the framework?" No respondent is able to answer the question.

APPENDIX C: **REVISED CONCEPT PAPER AND DIAGRAM**

**Student Affairs Organizations as Learning Organizations:
Toward a Conceptual Framework for Organizational
Quality Improvement**

Concept Paper and Diagram

Student Affairs Organizations as Learning Organizations: Toward a Conceptual Framework for Organizational Quality Improvement

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study designed to develop and validate a conceptual framework for organizational quality improvement in higher education. Your feedback on the framework is critical, as it will inform the research study and provide implications for further research. The researcher is employing a two-round modified Delphi method. After the first round of interviews, the researcher will analyze the data, revise the framework and resend a modified version back to you. This will be followed by a second round interview for any additional comments and feedback.

Below are the study's overview, some guidelines and expectations for your participation, as well as the concept paper to assist you in preparation for the first round interview. The diagram of Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework (the Framework) will follow.

If you have any questions or concerns prior to the interview, please feel free to contact me at 412-795-0561 or Michelet@pitt.edu.

Study Overview

Quality improvement in higher education is not a novel concept. A recent report issued by the Federal Commission on Higher Education indicated that the American higher education system was in crisis and in need of reform in order to remain competitive in the 21st century (Spelling, 2006). Articles and reports sharing these sentiments are prominent in the discourse about higher education (Spencer-Matthews, 2001; Houston & Studman, 2001) and have been so for many years (Seymour, 1992; Ewell, 1991; and Entin, 1993; Lueddeke, 1999). In fact, scholars who study higher education find a contingent of the community intrigued by and very passionate about understanding and implementing strategies to improve higher education management. Scholars and practitioners alike mull over the multitude of challenges facing education in general, and post secondary education in particular (Peterson, 1998). Questions about educational cost, quality of instruction, organizational effectiveness, and student outcomes have barraged educators and administrators to the point that there is no clearly conceptualized, grounded approach to address these growing concerns. The demands by various stakeholders have undoubtedly caused some members of the higher education community to seek greater understanding and opportunities to improve and sustain quality.

Student affairs organizations, a critical division in higher education institutions, have not been immune to these and other criticisms. Lack of documented student learning outcomes, costs to deliver programs and services, the changing and divergent roles within the context of higher education (Greenleaf, 1994; Love & Love 1994) are just a few of the issues facing student affairs organizations. Many of these same challenges have persisted throughout the short tenure of the student affairs profession (Crookston, 1972; Buchanan, 1995).

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The purpose of this study is to develop and validate a conceptual framework for understanding and improving student affairs organizations within the context of higher education institutions. By doing so, the researcher will re-appropriate the concept of a "Learning Organization" as the foundation upon which to build the conceptual framework. Ideally, Student affairs organizations can become learning organizations; organizations where the capacity to continuously transform, learn, and lead, translates into effective practice. A socially constructed, humanistic framework for understanding and addressing some of the future challenges of student affairs needs to be put forth. This heuristic tool could advance thinking and transform practices to improve quality.

The framework will be developed based on concepts and ideas that have been advanced in empirical research, policy documents, higher education documents, student affairs organizational documents, and through dialogue between the researcher and the study participants. The framework is humanistic in that it centers on the people within student affairs organizations and not elements of commonly prescribed approaches to quality improvement such as inputs and processes (accreditation); curriculum and content (academic program review); processes and controls (TQM); or outcomes (outcomes assessment).

Delphi Study Participant's Guidelines and Expectations
In reviewing the framework, please consider the following issues:
- The descriptions and appropriateness of the constructs used in the framework to improve student affairs organizations
- Explanations of the relationships among the constructs used in the framework
- The framework's heuristic capability
- Applicability of the framework in student affairs organizations
- Revisions or modifications to the framework
- Overall perceptions of the framework

Please note the following:
- Please use your experiences, formal education, and cultural background when thinking about how this framework can be appropriate for student affairs organizations.
- Written revisions and additions are acceptable and can be made directly to the design of framework.
- Where possible, please be prepared to discuss warrants, references, and any appropriate citations.

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Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework
Draft

This dissertation is conceptual research study in higher education management with implications for application and practice. This is a qualitative study using elements of grounded theory methodology. Through an extensive literature analysis, the researcher describes the current calls for accountability in American higher education and then presents a comparative analysis of the dominant quality management strategies and practices employed in higher education institutions.

The researcher then develops and validates a conceptual framework for advancing a conversation on organizational quality improvement in higher education by re-appropriating the "Learning Organization" concept popularized in managerial literature by Senge (1994). The learning organization represents an organizational form in which the capacity for individual and group learning continuously expands. In a learning organization, the organization's culture and leadership foster an environment where knowledge acquisition, knowledge interpretation, knowledge transmission, and knowledge application drive organizational transformation and improvement. The organization's capacity and ability to learn is critical to sustainability in the 21st century and has been put forth as an area of research for at least the 15 years (Senge, 1994; Garvin 1993; Nonaka, 1995).

The researcher proposes that a learning organization framework could mitigate many concerns regarding the higher education enterprise. A learning organization framework addresses the human aspects of organizational functioning. The paucity of humanistic approaches in higher education management literature represents a significant gap in the literature. This dearth of research also illuminates the overly prescriptive and instrumental nature of current organizational research, which leaves current approaches, strategies, and tools subject to criticisms of being a passing fad (e.g. Total Quality Management). Table 1 summarizes the context under which the study will be developed.

Table 1

Imperatives for a Different Perspective to Quality Improvement

Imperatives for a Different Perspective to Quality Improvement	Examples
Pressure for accountability from internal and external stakeholders	Government, communities, parents, students, and industry
Lack of shared understanding for what constitutes quality	Compliance vs. status quo maintenance vs. accountability vs. Transformation
Weaknesses of current quality	Narrowly focused, lacks conceptual

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| improvement approaches | foundations, overly prescriptive |
| Dominance of structural functional views of organizations | Academic program review, Accreditation, TQM, etc. |

Since the researcher's formal education and work experience is in the student affairs profession, the unit of analysis and instrumental case for the study is student affairs organizations, a critical division within higher education institutions. An instrumental case "provides insights into an issue or refinement of a theory. The case is of secondary interest (p.88)." This study explores the overarching question: **how can higher student affairs organizations improve to address current challenges and the challenges of 21st century organizations.** To explore and articulate plausible answers to this overarching question, the related research questions are as follows:

1. How do higher education institutions address issues of quality (accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, resources, etc) ?
2. What does quality mean in the context of student affairs organizations?
3. What constructs are in a learning organization framework and what relationships exist among them?
4. In what ways can the learning organization framework facilitate organizational improvement in student affairs organizations? Is the framework practical?

CURRENT APPROACHES TO IMPROVING HIGHER EDUCATION

To address the myriad criticisms aimed at higher education institutions, it is critical that scholars and practitioners seek ways to understand and improve the quality of the enterprise. Approaches through which aspects of higher education quality have been evaluated include accreditation, academic program review, total quality management (TQM), and outcomes assessment. The researcher has reviewed these approaches and found that they may be inadequate primarily due to the lack of a well- articulated and grounded conceptual foundations. TQM provides a somewhat balanced approached to quality improvement but still lacks a conceptual foundation that can translate into higher education management practice. Outcomes assessment is the current focus of quality improvement efforts in student affairs organizations, given its focus on student learning and development. However, these efforts are geared more toward justifying the existing modis operandi and not necessarily transforming culture, practices, policies, or structures to improve quality. Accrediting agencies have recently incorporated student learning outcomes in its criteria for institutional accreditation, but these expectations have not permeated fundamental practices in student affairs organizations. If members of the student affairs community would consider improving the quality of the student affairs organization through an emphasis on the people in the organization, a likely result would be the improvement of other important areas, namely, student learning and development outcomes, (arguably the most appropriate indicator of quality).

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STUDENT AFFAIRS AND THE LEARNING ORGANIZATION: THE FOUNDATION FOR ADDRESSING 21st CENTURY CHALLENGES

The student affairs profession is designed to support and facilitate the learning and development of college students. Helping young adults find meaning and purpose in their lives is what drives the practice of many student affairs professionals. Generally, practitioners enter the field because of their own positive collegiate experiences in student organizations, student government, the residence halls, fraternities and sororities, etc. Practitioners often seek to provide similar learning and developmental experiences for students. Several interdisciplinary theories underpin the educational practice of the student affairs profession such as student development, human development, adult learning theories, behavioral-cognitive theories, and constructivist pedagogy, to name a few. However, diverse perspectives regarding the role of student affairs have unfortunately created silos among student affairs practitioners and scholars within the field, as well as within the larger higher education community (Hamrick, Evans, Schuh, 2002). Blimling contends that practitioners, without an understanding of their core philosophy, are likely to attempt to be all things to all people (2001).

Consequently, what constitutes "Quality" in student affairs organizations has not been explicitly expressed. In fact, many divergent perspectives regarding the role of student affairs in higher education institutions contribute ineffable considerations of quality (Bliming, 2005; Hamrick, Evans, Schuh, 2002). Since the current focus in higher education quality is on student learning and development outcomes (Commission on Higher Education, 2006) this focus should also be a prominent measure of quality within the student affairs organizations. Student learning, engagement, and development are fundamental pillars of the student affairs profession. Thus, the student affairs organization is relevant and timely for study.

The researcher selected student affairs organizations as the unit of analysis for four main reasons. First, the student affairs profession has a disposition toward a humanistic approach in its development of college students (Brown, 1972)—which focuses on helping students construct meaning, make decisions, and build their capacity for life-long learning. Second, it provides a focus for the research study, given the complexity and loose-coupling of higher education institutions Weick (1976), as well as broader movement to document student learning outcomes (Commission on Higher Education, 2006). Third, the framework could be useful for improving the organizational quality in student affairs as well as other areas of the academy where student learning and development are central outcomes. Finally, the researcher's educational and professional background is in student affairs, so practical experiences can inform the emerging conceptual framework.

Student affairs organizations are appropriate for contextualizing the learning organization framework for several reasons. First, the culture of student affairs is, to the greatest extent, amenable to humanistic organizational functioning, which is highlighted in learning organization literature. A humanistic approach represents a constructivist view that people are self-determining with a capacity to develop healthy, and fulfilling lives. This philosophy is noted in the student affairs literature as well (Love & Love, 1994). Student Affairs also supports a socio-technical organization design by creating an environment that supports student success (Hamrick, Evans, Schuh, 2002) as well as implementing many technical processes designed for achieving positive student outcomes. Socio-technical systems theory suggests that optimal

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organizational functioning occurs when the social systems, technical systems and the environment are aligned.

Second, similar to learning organizations, the student affairs profession embraces a culture of holistic development of college students, which is evident in many of the policies, procedures, processes, and practices implemented in student affairs organizations. Third, student affairs scholarship and practice draw heavily on developmental, cognitive, and behavioral theories as well as a constructivist pedagogy, all of which represent humanistic epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions. These assumptions also ground the learning organization discourse.

Thus, student affairs and the learning organization concept serve as a foundation onto which a grounded conceptual framework will be developed to facilitate the dialogue on organizational quality improvement, as well as to ground the ideas, strategies and practices currently used in higher education and student affairs that are implemented in the name of quality improvement.

The learning organization concept, popularized in managerial literature by Peter Senge (1994) represents an organizational form in which the capacity for individual and group learning continuously expands (Garvin, 1993; Senge 1990). Learning becomes a necessity given that organizations are functioning in a knowledge driven economy (Nonaka, 1995). Authors from many fields have put forth definitions of the learning organization dating back to the 1970's from Chris Aygris to as recent as scholars such as Dibella and Nevis (1998), to name a few. While the learning organization concept represents the ideal form of an organization required to compete in the knowledge era, it also illustrates an organization where people are viewed as valuable—not only as an organization's resource, but also as agents of his or her own life choices and the imposition of these choices on the world (CITATION). The learning organization commits to facilitating people's personal and professional learning and development so that they may achieve a desirable level of self-actualization (Snell, 2001; Casey 2003). The learning organization literature in popular press is very management and practitioner-based and has been criticized as being a passing managerial fad (Birnbaum, 2000; Kezar 2005). Its use in this dissertation is to provide a conceptual archetype onto which a grounded theoretical foundation can be mapped, as many of the ideas, strategies, and practices concerning the learning organization concept from the quality improvement literature are appropriate for student affairs organizations and higher education in general.

BUILDING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This dissertation centers on building and validating a conceptual framework that can assist the student affairs organization in improving organizational quality toward the ends of improving other outcomes—primarily student learning and development outcomes such as critical thinking, interpersonal communication, time management, decision-making, etc. The researcher mined four streams of literature which were accessed as the framework emerged. The streams of literature evolved from two courses taken during the researcher's course studies— *Quality Assurance in Higher Education* and *Organization Development and Leadership in Higher Education*. The four streams of literature include quality management, student affairs, organizational culture, and the learning organization. The constructs that emerged from these literatures are articulated in Table 2 below:

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Table 2

Contributing Literatures and Their Rationale

Literature	Resulting Constructs/Concepts	Rationale
Quality Improvement	Organizational Learning	Overarching topic under investigation
Organizational Culture	Transformational Leadership	A mitigating determinant of organizational functioning
Student Affairs	leadership, learning, learning communities	The unit of analysis in which the conceptual framework is situated
Learning Organizations	Leadership, Organizational Learning, Knowledge Management, Communities of Practice	This concept is the foundation for the conceptual framework for student affairs

The four constructs for the framework emerged as a result of the literature analysis as well as the critical reflection of the researcher. The constructs include organizational learning, knowledge management, communities of practice, and transformational leadership. These constructs emerged for several reasons. First, each construct aligns with the assumptions of the humanistic perspective and the researcher's social constructivist orientation. Second, in current strategies to improve quality in higher education such as academic program review, accreditation, total quality management and outcomes assessment, these constructs are narrowly addressed. When they are addressed, it is tangential to the substantive components of these strategies. Third, each construct (communities of practice being the newest) exists within a particular discourse lending them to ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions shared by many within a scholarly community—mitigating an overly prescriptive use in practice. Fourth, the constructs share ethos of the student affairs profession and are often suggested in student affairs research. Finally, these constructs frequently overlap in the literature suggesting the interrelatedness and appropriateness for further examination of their relationships.

Organizational learning has a long history and substantive body of research dating back as far as the 1950's (March & Simon 1958; Kezar, 2005). In fact, the concept of the learning organization builds upon the more extensive theoretical organizational learning literature (Dill, 2001). It will be included in the learning organization framework because it is inextricably linked to any conception of the learning organization addressing individual, group, and organizational learning processes. Additionally, organizational learning occurs when the meaning, interpretation, and reality developed by people in social interactions are embedded in the culture of the organization and are used in organizational practices. This understanding aligns with both the humanistic and social constructivist assumptions of the researcher.

Knowledge management is included in the framework because it captures the knowledge that is produced during organizational learning activities. It is a discipline designed to improve organizational practice by ensuring that knowledge management is an important organization capacity created in the organization is distributed appropriately throughout the organization. The framework also includes communities of practice because they serve as fluid structures through which knowledge can be created, interpreted, shared, and applied. Wenger (1991) coined the term "communities of practice" to describe groups that engage in the process of learning in some shared domain. Domains represent shared interests among people and an expertise that may or may not be recognized outside of a particular community. Communities represent the interactions and activities that allow for learning, knowledge construction and sharing to occur. Practice denotes that members of these communities are practitioners—those who employ skills, tools, and techniques to address the challenges they encounter in diverse settings (Wenger, 1999).Communities of practice are important in the framework because learning—through dialogue, reflection, evaluation and experience—is the central, if not the only activity in these communities.

The transformational leadership construct is part of this framework because multiple literatures suggest the importance of leadership in improving organizational quality. Unlike many constructs of leadership, transformational leadership suggests a humanistic focus on the role of leaders in the organization. Among key attributes, transformational leaders seek to incorporate the goals of organizational members into the vision of the organization. This type of leadership style creates and sustains a culture that maximizes the human agency by integrating learning processes with work tasks and seeks to meet higher-level needs of organizational members.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Bauman (2005) writes, "Colleges and Universities have been highlighted as an example of a type of organization that does not engage in organizational learning effectively (p.23)." However, countless definitions of organizational learning abound in the literature, but they all suggest that organizations cannot learn independent of the learning that takes place among individuals (Berends, et. al, 2003). Boreham and Morgan (2004) contend that,

> Most researchers define learning as organizational to the extent that it is undertaken by members of an organization to achieve organizational purposes, takes place in teams or other small groups, is distributed widely throughout the organization and embeds its outcomes in the organization's systems, structure, and culture (p.308).

For this analysis, the researcher agrees with Berands, et. al. who contends that definitions of organizational learning lack a comprehensive account of the social phenomena that takes places among individuals and the organization. They suggest organization learning is, "the process leading to changes in possible organizational practices, based on the development of knowledge of the actors executing those practices" (Berends, et. al., 2003 p.13)-or exercising human agency. Organizational learning is a social process through which organizational members interpret and make meaning of interactions with data, information, other members of the organization, and factors in the environment. In this definition, the interactions of people in the execution and creation of knowledge is essential. Knowledge then informs organizational functioning. This construct emerged primarily from the literature analysis on the learning

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organizations. It also emerged from the researcher's own professional practice in two student affairs divisions, one where organizational learning was encouraged and one where an understanding of the concept did not permeate the organization.

Organizational learning is not unique to the learning organization, but occurs in every organization (Easterby-Smith, 1997). It will be included in the learning organization framework because it is inextricably linked to any conception of the learning organization. Additionally, organizational learning occurs when the meaning, interpretation and reality developed by people in social interactions embed in the culture of the organization and is used in organizational practices. This understanding aligns with both the humanistic and social constructivist assumptions of the researcher. Berands et. al. (2003) aptly suggest, "In our account of organizational learning, however, the constituting roles of human agents are essential" (p.XXX). It also complements practitioner-based ideologies of what occurs in learning organizations (Senge, 1990). Kezar contends that it is more worthwhile to draw on theoretical conceptions of organizational learning and to avoid, in her estimation, the faddish concept of the learning organization altogether (2005).

Student affairs organizations, critical divisions in higher education, will benefit from understanding the role organizational learning plays in 21st century organizations as well as the facilitation of organizational learning will improve the functioning of organizations and subsequently, desired outcomes. As mentioned, silo mentality and practice exist in many student affairs organizations and are often based on functional areas such as residence life, student activities, and counseling services. These areas tend to develop a subculture based on specific practical knowledge requisite for the work it entails. For example, members of a student activities office may extend their learning only to opportunities related to their sub-specialty such as program planning, marketing, student outreach and event planning. However, if a prominent measure of quality in student affairs organizations includes a level of student learning and development, members in the student activities office should look to build learning capacity by working with other functional areas about strategies employed to improve student learning and development through the use of student activities. For example, student activities administrators can interact with leadership development educators to discuss ways in which student activities can enhance leadership development opportunities for students. Additionally, these administrators can reflect on their work and engage in informal learning opportunities such as professional conferences, webinars, e-courses, etc. To prepare students for a knowledge economy, it is important for student affairs professionals in all functional areas to shift their thinking to view learning as the foundation of work, and then model this thinking in daily practice for students.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

This construct emerged through the researcher's analysis of quality management literature and literature on organizational culture as well as learning organizations. For example, Garvin (1993) contends that effective learning organizations know how to transfer knowledge effectively throughout the organization. Like quality improvement, organizational learning, and many of the concepts presented in this study, knowledge management has a plethora of meanings with which it is associated. It has also been touted as a reinvention of library science and information management (Ponzi, 2001; Milam, 2005). However, in this study, knowledge management is the practice of effectively storing, accessing, and diffusing information

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throughout the organization so that localized learning can become organizational learning—increasing an organization's capacity to continue to learn and compete in the 21st century. . However, knowledge management is different from these disciplines because it defines knowledge as human judgment and experience combined with information (Sunassee & Sewry, 2002). Information science and library science focuses on processes for knowledge storage and retrieval (Milam, 2005). Sunassee & Sewry (2002) contend that knowledge is, "Human expertise stored in a person's mind gained through experience, and interaction with the person's environment" (p. 235). They further suggest economics, politics, as well as organizational culture influence organizational learning, knowledge creation and management.

Knowledge management, like organizational learning is pervasive in the quality improvement literature. In managerial practice, it emphasizes the role of information technology (Sunassee and Sewry, 2002) and not the humanistic aspects of knowledge creation, sharing, and application. It is included in the learning organization framework because knowledge is the outcome of what is produced through organizational learning activities and the management of this knowledge allows organizations to compete in a knowledge driven economy. It is also a discipline designed to improve organizational practice, which currently lacks a conceptual foundation in organizational studies in general in higher education management literature (Thorn, 2001 as cited in Milam, 2005).

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Communities of practice are important places of knowledge creation, interpretation, and diffusion. These communities are groups of practitioners who care deeply about their work and seek to regularly improve their practice through learning experiences and opportunities with other members of the community. Garvin (1993) suggests that knowledge is difficult to develop passively and that experience is a powerful method for becoming knowledgeable. Communities of practice facilitate this development among participating members.

Since communities of practice are not necessarily based on traditional functional areas, this construct is appropriate for improving organizational quality as many practitioners in the student affairs field work in communities of practices that are both within their functional areas and outside of those professional boundaries. This study utilizes Blimling's (2001) four student affairs communities of practice. The researcher introduces an additional one. They are appropriate for contextualizing the conceptual framework developing herein.

Blimling (2001) contends that the communities of practice in the student affairs profession yield differing theories, assumptions and practices, which, if not understood, leads to professional identity confusion and misaligned practices. Blimling suggests that communities of practice "define how information will be used and what information will be acceptable in a field (p.XX)." Understanding these communities can help student affairs practitioners develop a professional identity and problematize the many reports calling for student affairs accountability, reform, and improvement (2001). The communities of practice include student administration, student services, student development, and student learning. Each of this will be discussed in turn, and the researcher offers a fifth community, which is student affairs research and assessment community of practice.

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The student affairs administration community of practice is comprised of professional who adhere to a philosophy of resource allocation in the name of students. Many stakeholders and purveyors external to student affairs view this practice as the only role of student affairs organizations (Blimling, 2001). The student services community of practice is similar to the student administration community in that the focus tends to be on student management more so than the learning and development education. This community of practice or philosophy of student affairs was dominate during the period of consumerism when students became the customer and many business strategies such as TQM were imported to improve student satisfaction (Blimling, 2001). The goal of this community is to improve services that will keep students satisfied.

The third community of practice is the one focusing on student development. Earlier, the researcher suggested that student affairs is an appropriate unit of analysis because of its humanistic disposition. This community of practice emerged from the humanistic movement in psychology. Student affairs scholars posited that practitioners should be experts in both cognitive and psychosocial development. Student affairs professionals in this community see the role of student affairs professionals as educators who equally contribute to the development of students, as do faculty in the classroom (Blimling, 2001). Those within this community of practice develop programs, opportunities, and experiences that are designed to address developmental needs of students at various points in the collegiate experience (Blimling, 2001).

The student learning community of practice broadens the student development philosophy and seeks to engage students in all aspects of learning (Blimling, 2001). This community seeks to partner with faculty to design opportunities and experiences that compliment the academic activities in the classroom. Seeing the student affairs role as educators who partner with faculty, student affairs professionals in this community focus on developing competencies that will allow students to engage in life long learning.

The researcher offers a fifth community of practice which includes those participating in student affairs research and assessment. This community comprises professionals who care about advancing the scholarly research in the field and determining if the work in student affairs achieves desirable goals and outcomes. These practitioners also seek to disseminate information to help frontline professionals in their direct work with students. Members of this community are prominent presenters, lectures, and presenters at national association conferences as well as serve as consultants to institutions.

The learning organization framework includes communities of practice because they serve as fluid entities through which knowledge can be developed, interpreted, shared, and applied. What makes communities of practice useful in the framework is that the learning taking place matters deeply to the people in the group. As suggested earlier, the student affairs profession is one where practitioners are often deeply committed to their work with college students. The learning and development of college students as well as providing high quality services matter to those who are student affairs professionals.

Additionally, social constructivism grounds the concept such that learning is viewed as a social process. Communities of practice are humanistic in that learning is the primary activity

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and the focus is on the social interactions and practices among people within them. Practice does not only improve from individual activities, but from social interactions and activities among practitioners of the community.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transformational leadership is a framework construct that was gleaned from all of the streams of literature, but particularly from the literature on organizational culture. Leadership is intrinsically linked to organizational culture because it can facilitate or hinder quality improvement efforts (Schein, 1992). Effective leadership has been cited as a necessary element for quality improvement and organizational culture is the portal to changing the way in which organizations function. However, Phfeffer (1978) contends that the concept of leadership is challenging for two main reasons including the ambiguity as well as the many constructs used to explain the phenomena. Additionally, a lack of consensus exists concerning the extent to which leadership directly impacts organizational improvement.

Regardless of these challenges, "There is a call for transformational change in higher education…" (Mavrinac,2005, p.391). Transformational leadership may be the type of leadership requisite for improving organizational quality (Hickman, 1997). This type of leadership characterizes the kind of powerful transformation possible in mature organizations such as student affairs organizations within higher education institutions because, like student affairs and higher education, transformational leadership seeks to improve society and the human experience.

Transformational leadership theory was first introduced by Burns in 1978 in a political science context and moved to the organizational literature in 1985 (Elkins & Keller 2003). It provides useful framework for understanding the role of leadership in quality improvement efforts. Transformational leadership creates and sustains a culture that maximizes the human agency by integrating learning processes and seeking to meet higher-level needs of organizational members. Hickman's "Transformistic Organizations" framework describes leadership that has the capacity to change individuals, organizations and the greater society so that all three levels can adapt to a changing environment (1997, p.1).

In Burn's conception of transformational leadership, four dimensions exist. Charisma is the ability of a leader to influence others through exemplification of personal values that are also held deeply and widely among organizational members. Charisma suggests that a person can model behavior associated with those values (Bass, 1990). Motivation is the second dimension of transformational leadership and suggests that a leader has a message that is inspirational and moves beyond the immediate goals of the organization and reaches personal goals of organizational members. Intellectual stimulation is the dimension that suggests leaders can challenge mental models, unearth deeply held assumptions and invigorate processes of critical reflection, decision making, participation, etc.(Bass, 1990). The last dimension is individualized attention and consideration. Here, the leader seeks to develop organizational members' personal and professional capacities. Leaders are viewed as mentors and coaches. They believe that organizational members are the keys to successful organizations and will tap into their knowledge, skills, and abilities (Bass, 1990). Hickman builds on Bass's earlier conceptions

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suggesting that while the focus was on leaders and followers, a more enhanced perspective concerns leadership not only with members in the organization, but also with society (1997).

Transformational leadership develops a culture of quality, which the researcher defines as a culture of learning, and seeks to provide opportunities for learning to occur. Mavrinac (2005) suggests that, "the concept of a learning culture has been criticized for its utopian claims, vague definition and lack of empirical evidence about how learning is transferred from the individual to the organization, how organizations learn and the degree to which organizational performance is improved" (p.392). However, the researcher supports Marvrinac assertion that the process of learning is itself transformational and that in order to improve, a level of learning must occur (p. 392).

Schein, (1992) contends that leadership should uncover assumptions, and determine how they are manifested in values, artifacts, and symbols. Leadership should also be prepared "...to deal with the anxiety unleashed when these levels of culture are challenged (p. 27)." Schein (1990) also suggests that in order for a leadership to exude charisma, they must be acutely aware of the various levels of the organizational culture. This can include elements such as artifacts, ceremonies, rituals, language, symbols, etc. al of which influence organizational behavior and practice as well as subsequent outcomes. Chaffee and Tierney (1988) also contend that one of the most critical aspects of leadership entails nurturing the culture and understanding discrepancies in perceptions. Again socially constructed perceptions shape realities and impact behaviors, practices, and outcomes.

To be sure, leadership and culture are inextricably linked in any discussion about organizational quality improvement. The transformational leadership construct is included in the conceptual framework because it is aligned with researcher's natural proclivity toward human agency and social constructivism and with the overarching philosophy of student affairs and higher education. As with transformational leadership, student affairs professionals seek to build the capacity of students to lead meaningful and productive lives.

THE STUDENT AFFAIRS LEARNING ORGANIZATION FRAMEWORK

The learning organization, as articulated by Senge and others, is effective at organizational learning (Tsang, 1995). Organizational learning occurs when student affairs professionals, in social interactions and social environments—such as the five communities of practice—create, interpret, share, and apply knowledge that can affect organizational behavior and practice. Knowledge is the combination of judgment and experience developed by people based on data and information. Knowledge becomes embedded in organizational culture, which is comprised of underlying assumptions, values, and artifact—all of which influence practice. Free exchange of individuals into different communities of practice supports increased opportunities for learning (Brown and Duguid, 1991). Communities of practice manage the knowledge that is derived from a learning culture (Snell, 2001). Transformative leadership shapes the organizational culture requisite for learning and plays a critical role in the learning organization. Leadership is distributed across all levels of the organization and facilitates learning within and among the communities of practice. The learning organization framework illustrated in figure 1 provides an initial examination of the constructs and their relationships among each other.

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Propositions of the Student Affairs Learning Organization Framework

1. The concept of the Learning Organization represents a humanistic approach to organizational quality improvement. Student affairs organizations are, to the greatest extent, humanistic in its approach to student learning and development.

2. The concept of the Learning Organization posits a learning culture as a requisite for organizational quality improvement. Unfortunately, student affairs divisions do not always function in institutions where learning is emphasized. However, student affairs divisions should transform into learning cultures and serve as models and facilitators of adult and life-long learning.

3. Organizational learning is related to an organization's capacity to create, re-appropriate disseminate and diffuse knowledge. Effective organizational learning increases an organization's capacity to manage knowledge and managing knowledge increases an organization's capacity to learn. Since student affairs organizations represent and interdisciplinary set of knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes that can contribute to the overall student success, organizational learning strategies and knowledge management systems should be enhanced to improve these competencies for student affairs professionals.

4. Managing the knowledge created or incorporated through organizational learning activities improves the organization's ability to adapt in a knowledge-driven environment. Student affairs organizations are not immune to the myriad criticisms aimed at uncovering the value, the cost, and the contribution of higher education to individuals, organizations, and the greater society. Stakeholders want knowledge so that their decisions can be better informed. Student affairs must adapt to the competitive drivers of knowledge management and also the internal benefit derived from organizational learning.

5. Communities of practice are the places where organizational learning activities occur. Members of the communities share a particular orientation and have created a culture that represents the values of their orientation. Their behavior and activities are also informed by this orientation. Four communities of practices seem to permeate student affairs organizations and should be recognized by those attempting to create learning organizations. Cultures of communities of practice are the gatekeepers to improving quality.

6. Transformational leadership represents the kind of leadership that values the intrinsic worth of those within the organizations. Leadership is distributed throughout the organization because and members participate in decision making. Organizational members see their values and beliefs present in the vision of the organization. Leadership is charismatic, inspirational and stimulates organizational members in ways that facilitate their pursuit of professional and personal development.

These propositions represent an organizational quality improvement framework applied in student affairs organizations. This study does not intend to describe the plethora of disciplines,

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practices, and strategies that can be used to develop the learning organizations—this literature abounds. It does however attempt to provide a conceptual foundation of how and why a humanistic approach to organizational quality improvement can ground activities taking place.

Figure1.

Student Affairs Learning Organization
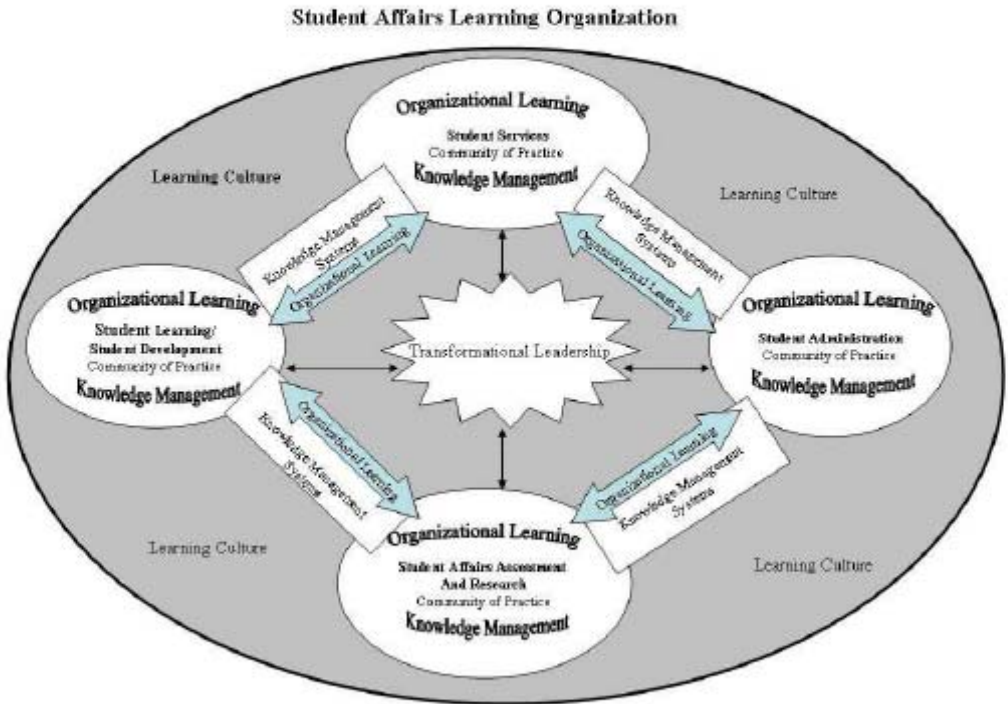
APPENDIX D: **DELPHI INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Learning Organization Framework

Semi-structured Telephone Interview Protocol

Round 1

Base Code Data

1. How many years have you been in the student affairs profession?
2. How would you characterize your research interests?
3. How would characterize your philosophy of practice?
4. How would describe the culture of your student affairs organization?
5. How would you describe your area of focus in your graduate program?
6. What are challenges facing student affairs organization?
7. How would define a quality student affairs organization?

Overall Perceptions of the Framework

1. How would you critique the learning organization framework?
   Probing Questions:

   - How does the Learning Organization framework describe the meaning of the constructs? In what ways would you improve the descriptions of the constructs?
   - In what ways should the relationships between constructs be explained?
   - How does the framework suggest underlying assumptions about a social phenomenon? In what ways should the framework suggest underlying assumptions about social phenomenon?
2. Describe the ways in which you would modify the framework? Please explain the rationale for each of the modifications you have suggested.
   Probing questions:

   - What limitations to practice do you perceive?
   - In what ways can the framework translate into practice?
3. What are strategies that can improve quality in higher education and specifically student affairs organizations?
   Probing questions:

   - Given your knowledge and/or experience, what strategies have been successful in improving higher education or student affairs quality?
   - What strategies have been unsuccessful?

Learning Organization Framework

Semi-structured Telephone Interview Protocol

Round 2

Overall Perceptions of the Framework

1. How would you critique the revised learning organization framework?
   Probing Questions:

   - How does the revised Learning Organization framework describe the meaning of the constructs? In what ways would you improve the descriptions of the constructs?
   - In what ways should the relationships between constructs be explained?
   - How does the revised framework suggest underlying assumptions about a social phenomenon? In what ways should the revised framework suggest underlying assumptions about social phenomenon?

2. Describe the ways in which you would modify the revised framework? Please explain the rationale for each of the modifications you have suggested.
   Probing questions:

   - What limitations to practice do you perceive?
   - In what ways can the revised framework translate into practice?

3. What are strategies that can improve quality in higher education and specifically student affairs organizations?
   Probing questions:

   - Given your knowledge and/or experience, what strategies have been successful in improving higher education or student affairs quality?
   - What strategies have been unsuccessful?

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