Fall 2023

Emotional Intelligence in Difficult Decision-Making: A Multiple-Case Study of Community College Academic Deans

<interrupted_label>Ekate

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN DIFFICULT DECISION-MAKING: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC DEANS

by

Ekaterina Kalinina Brooks
B.A. June 2004, Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University
M.A. May 2011, East Carolina University

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
December 2023

Approved by:

David Ayers (Director)

Jason Lynch (Methodologist)

Mitchell Williams (Member)

ABSTRACT

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN DIFFICULT DECISION-MAKING: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC DEANS

Ekaterina Kalinina Brooks
Old Dominion University
Director: Dr. David Ayers

The decisions made by leaders noticeably impact employee morale and influence the fulfillment of the organizational mission. However, making decisions can be challenging when options are complex and involve multiple risks and benefits. Navigating such decisions in an era of technology when decisions are more transparent than ever before can be particularly difficult for academic deans in community colleges. These mid-level administrators often face internal conflicts stemming from the nature of their positions, campus politics, and the challenge of working between the competing interests of faculty and senior leaders.

Over the last three decades, research has pointed out that strong emotional intelligence skills are one of the key indicators of effective decision-making. Yet only a handful of studies have addressed the role of emotional intelligence in decision-making in a community college context. There is a need to understand better the ways deans' emotional intelligence facilitates their decision-making. This qualitative multiple-case study was designed to explore the ways in which community college academic deans draw on emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions. Through data collected from multiple cases and two-phase data analysis, including a within-case analysis and cross-case examination, this research provides insight into the participants' emotional intelligence in the participants' decision-making.

Keywords: academic deans, community colleges, emotional intelligence, decision-making, difficult decisions, mid-level administrators.

To my son, Maxim. I hope this dissertation will encourage you to follow your dreams, trust

yourself, and never give up.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have contributed to the successful completion of this dissertation. First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my committee members for their guidance, dedication, and support. Thank you, Dr. David Ayers, for your wisdom and leadership as my committee chair. Your knowledge and experience provided clear direction for my learning through this process. Thank you for our weekly meetings, your patience, and your continuous support for me. I thank Dr. Jason Lynch, my methodologist, who made me fall in love with qualitative research since the very first class he taught. I am grateful for the opportunities he provided to stretch my thinking and develop a passion for a reflexive process. I thank Dr. Mitchell Williams for his ability to engage students in discussions and foster rich and active learning. Dr. Williams challenged me to maintain high standards, offered valuable insights, and provided support when I lacked confidence in myself.

I am deeply indebted to my former supervisor, Dr. Dean Roughton, for encouraging me to pursue this degree. I will never forget the day you put "apply for the doctoral degree" as one of the goals on my yearly evaluation form. You told me that you knew I would do it if it was formally listed there. Thank you for your profound belief in my abilities and your unwavering support.

I am extremely grateful to my husband, Frank Brooks, for being by my side through the ups and downs of this dissertation journey. Thank you for telling me I could do it when I doubted myself. Thank you for being my cheerleader, my best friend, and an amazing husband and father. You are my rock. I'd also like to extend my gratitude to my son, Maxim. Thank you for your love, patience, and understanding through these years of my graduate work. Your warm hugs and kisses motivated me each step of the way.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The decisions made by educational leaders noticeably influence the fulfillment of organizational mission and access to educational opportunities for those who otherwise would not be able to pursue them (Gonzales, 2019). Although some decisions are easy, other decisions are more challenging as they may have costly consequences for the organization and a detrimental effect on an individual's career and reputation. The higher one climbs the organizational ladder, the more often difficult decisions must be made (Gonzales, 2019).

Making decisions can be particularly difficult for academic deans in community colleges. These individuals often face internal conflicts stemming from the nature of their mid-level positions (Nguyen, 2014; Rentsch, 2018; Sill, 2018; Yamamura, 2018). Insufficient policy and practical guidance for ethical decision-making, campus politics, and the challenge of working between the competing interests of faculty and senior administration make administrator's decision-making difficult, especially when decisions concern personnel issues, diversity, and legal matters (Bray, 2008; Burns, 2008; Nguyen, 2014; Sill, 2014).

Although many factors impact people's decisions, over the last three decades, scholars across industries and countries have suggested that strong emotional intelligence is one of the key indicators of effective decision-making. Individuals with strong emotional intelligence skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, management of others' emotions, and using emotion to enhance cognition tend to be more consistent and focused on their decision-making resulting in more reliable and certain decisions (Alkozei et al., 2016). Such individuals are less likely to demonstrate deceptive behavior or involve themselves in actions that harm others (Angelidis & Ibrahim, 2011). Individuals who see how their emotions may affect their judgment, and who can

regulate their emotional reactions, may more effectively use their emotions to understand complicated situations, problem-solve, and make informed ethical decisions (Hopkins & Deepa, 2018).

Although the literature on the topic generally reflects the importance of emotional intelligence for effective and ethical decision-making, only a handful of studies centered on the role of emotional intelligence in leadership and decision-making in a community college context (Freed, 2016; Mazeh, 2011; Scott, 2004). Moreover, the results of these studies are contradictory. Therefore, there is a need to understand better in which ways deans' emotional intelligence facilitates their decision-making. An understanding of how academic deans' emotional intelligence is expressed in complex decision-making situations may lead to increased quality and effectiveness of decision-making processes.

Background of the Study

Although many scholars have documented a relationship between emotional intelligence and decision-making, they tend to rely on self-report measures of emotional intelligence. Such studies suggest a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making (Angelidis & Ibrahim, 2011; Hopkins & Deepa, 2018; Scott, 2004). Since emotionally intelligent individuals are better able to recognize the emotions and societal norms affecting their ethical judgments, they may be more likely to make decisions with positive outcomes for all involved (Angelidis & Ibrahim, 2011; Hopkins & Deepa, 2018). Emotional intelligence also impacts social decision-making (Alkozei et al., 2016). Individuals with a higher ability to understand the emotions of self and others and who use this knowledge to facilitate cognitive processes can better integrate facial social cues into their decision-making and make more reliable and certain decisions (Alkozei et al., 2016).

Ability Emotional Intelligence and Decision-Making

To date, studies examining the link between emotional intelligence as mental ability (measured using performance tests) and decision-making have been limited. They show that emotional intelligence is related to indecisiveness (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011; Puffer, 2011); however, the findings are inconclusive. Some results show that increased emotional intelligence is likely to reduce career decision difficulties related to lack of information (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011). Other findings point to gender differences in the impact of various emotional intelligence competencies on career-decision making (Puffer, 2011). In one study (Puffer, 2011), a high emotion regulation ability among women predicted higher indecisiveness. In the same study, a higher emotion perception ability among men was associated with less nervousness in career decision-making (Puffer, 2011).

Fernández-Berrocal et al. (2014) found that highly emotionally intelligent individuals can respond flexibly to the interaction context and the strategies of others, including the ability to compete if needed with the purpose of goal attainment. Additionally, higher levels of emotional intelligence have been associated with superior performance on a complex decision-making task involving emotional information (Alkozei et al., 2019; Checa & Fernández-Berrocal, 2019; Ramchandran et al., 2020). Conversely, individuals with low emotional intelligence are more likely to engage in maladaptive decision-making (Yip et al., 2020).

Emotional Intelligence and Decision-Making in Educational Leadership Context

Researchers disagree on how, if at all, emotional intelligence relates to decision-making in an educational leadership context. On the one hand, researchers have argued that ethical decision-making and strong leadership require educational leaders to manage emotion effectively

(Freed, 2016; Harati, 2013; Parrish, 2015; Scott, 2004; Tenuto et al., 2016). From this perspective, acknowledging and managing emotion is crucial for effective leadership in an educational context (Freed; 2016; Parrish, 2015; Tenuto et al., 2016). If not managed properly, emotions can lead to "breaching confidentiality, seeking potentially untrustworthy colleagues for advice, or venting in an unprofessional manner' (Tenuto et al., 2016, p. 23). Emotional intelligence has also been associated with desirable outcomes. Through developed self-awareness and self-care, administrators are better able to role model ethical decision-making in complex and challenging situations and, as a result, improve their problem-solving and decision-making (Tenuto et al., 2016).

On the other hand, some scholars have found that emotional intelligence and decision-making are unrelated (Ellis, 2020; Mazeh, 2011; Torain, 2018). Torain's (2018) study, conducted with nine superintendents from a school district in one mid-Atlantic state in the United States, did not show any relationship between the levels of emotional intelligence and decision-making, nor a significant relationship between moral reasoning and decision-making. Ellis (2020) sought to understand the impact of emotional intelligence on leadership capacity in higher education administrators in eastern Tennessee's post-secondary institutions. The researcher found no direct connection between leadership capacity and emotional intelligence in the areas of decision-making and organizational commitment. Instead, leaders' decision-making was primarily guided by institutional mission and policy (Ellis, 2020).

Mazeh (2011) explored community college leaders' leadership experiences and whether they implemented emotional intelligence in their professional roles. Community college leaders, despite some knowledge of emotional intelligence, did not fully understand the concept and did not know how to apply it in their roles. Mazeh's findings related to community college leaders'

decision-making process are particularly salient to my research. Like Ellis (2020), Mazeh (2011) found that in making decisions, leaders adhered to the community college mission of supporting students and the application of institutional policy regardless of the decision's complexity. In sum, these findings raise questions about the importance of emotional intelligence for decision-making in an educational leadership context. More research on emotional intelligence and decision-making in a community college context is needed.

Theoretical Framework

I sought to understand the role of emotional intelligence in decision-making through the modified version of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso (2016) four-branch model of emotional intelligence (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Fitting emotional intelligence within the boundaries of conceptual definitions of intelligence, the developers of the current model view emotional intelligence as mental ability and conceptualize it as a set of four correlated components. In their view, emotional intelligence consists of the following abilities: (a) emotion recognition, (b) emotion understanding, (c) emotion regulation in oneself, and (d) emotion management.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case research is to explore the ways highly emotionally intelligent community college academic deans draw on emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions. Since I wanted to explore the ways in which ability emotional intelligence facilitated deans' decision-making, the choice of multiple-case study design was appropriate, as it allowed an exploration of a complex phenomenon through one or more cases within a particular context (Creswell, 2007). Through data collected from multiple participants and two-phase data analysis, including a within-case analysis and cross-case examination, this research design provides insight into the manifestation of emotional intelligence in the

participants' difficult decision-making. I define emotional intelligence as the "ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). Difficult decisions are defined as those involving complex options, multiple risks, and benefits.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research:

1. What difficult decisions do community college academic deans face in their professional roles?

2. How do highly emotionally intelligent academic deans employ emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions?

Significance of the Study

Community college academic deans occupy unique positions within the organizational hierarchy (Wild et al., 2003). Since these academic professionals serve as a bridge between senior administrators and faculty, staff, and students, their decisions potentially impact all aspects of student learning, faculty development, and the institutional environment. Although scholars increasingly recognize emotional intelligence as an important aspect of effective decision-making, no studies to the knowledge of the researcher have investigated the manifestation of high emotional intelligence in these leaders' decision-making, particularly in a community college setting. Additionally, research on the link between emotional intelligence and decision-making in an educational leadership context is inconclusive. I contribute to this debate by focusing specifically on the decision-making of community college academic deans with a high level of emotional intelligence.

The findings could also help senior community college leaders begin conversations with

their deans about the role of emotional intelligence in decision-making. Such discussions could help administrators gauge their leadership team's awareness of emotional intelligence. The results of this study may help senior administration to encourage more effective decision-making. Understanding how people draw on emotional intelligence in making complex decisions could assist aspiring leaders in preparing for leadership roles. It could also indicate a need to include emotional intelligence skills in the curricula of leadership development programs.

Overview of Methodology

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which academic deans draw on emotional intelligence in making difficult decisions. A qualitative multiple-case study approach was most appropriate for this research as it provided a rich framework for understanding the phenomenon of emotional intelligence in decision-making, participants' experiences related to this phenomenon, and the context in which it occurs (Creswell, 2007).

I used a purposeful, intensity sampling technique to identify participants with a high level of emotional intelligence. To measure prospective participants' emotional intelligence levels, I distributed the Geneva Emotional Competence Test (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019) to academic deans employed by community colleges in one southeastern state in the United States. I used the results to select twelve to fifteen community college academic deans with a high emotional intelligence level. Data for the study were collected through two semi-structured interviews with each participant and field notes. I analyzed the data in two stages, starting with the within-case analysis and concluding with the cross-case analysis.

Delimitations of Study

I used the following delimitations to narrow the scope of the study. First, I delimited the focus of the study to the exploration of emotional intelligence in the decision-making of only

those employed as community college academic deans. I limited the study to academic deans because of the uniqueness of their leadership positions and the potential for conflict of interest they experience in their roles (Burns, 2008; Gonzales, 2019). A second delimitation is a focus on academic deans with high emotional intelligence. This is an important delimitation, as I sought to interview individuals who possessed the explored skill. Finally, I delimited this study to the exploration of emotional intelligence only in the context of participants' complex decision-making.

Chapter Summary

In this introductory chapter, I provided an overview of the study. The chapter included the background of the study, theoretical framework, purpose statement, research questions, professional significance, an overview of the methodology, and delimitations. Chapter II reviews the literature relevant to the role, responsibilities, and challenges of community college academic deans, emotional intelligence, its classification, and the link between emotional intelligence and decision-making outside and within the educational leadership context. Chapter III presents the methodology for the study. Chapter IV describes the research findings. In Chapter V, I will discuss the study's findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide background for roles, responsibilities, important skills, traits, and competencies of community college academic deans. I will focus on the challenges, including those in decision-making, stemming from the nature of their mid-level position. The review of emotional intelligence, its various conceptualizations, outcomes, and role in decision-making will also be presented. The lack of studies on emotional intelligence in the decision-making of educational leaders, particularly in the community college context, calls for more research on this topic.

Community College Academic Deans

Community college academic deans occupy unique positions within the organizational hierarchy (Wild et al., 2003;). They serve as a bridge between policies and initiatives developed by senior administrators and the application of these initiatives for faculty, staff, and students (García et al., 2020; Yamamura, 2018). These academic professionals are responsible for managing faculty workloads, budgets, and course schedules, handling program and faculty evaluations, representing the community college at various public functions, and providing academic leadership (Reed, 2013). They potentially impact all aspects of student learning, faculty development, and the institutional environment. Not only do they carry out day-to-day business, but they also represent the pool of future community college senior leaders (Wild et al., 2003). For the purposes of this study, an academic dean is a community college employee in a supervisory position in academic affairs (assistant dean, associate dean, dean). An academic dean generally reports to the vice president of academic affairs.

Importance of an Academic Dean's Position

Multiple scholars sought to identify the responsibility areas of deans in higher education. Adams-Dunford et al. (2019) found that among some aspects of the organizational environment that mid-level administrators in higher education must manage are: (a) supervision, (b) generational differences, (c) political landscape, and (d) budget, planning, and assessment. Like other mid-level administrators, academic deans are responsible for moving strategies and resources in various directions across the institution and, therefore, they must interact with senior administration, faculty, and staff and communicate with students, parents, and other internal and external stakeholders (De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Tyrell, 2014; Rentsch, 2018; Stark, 2019). Nguyen (2014) pointed out that due to the nature of their positions, academic deans often establish close relationships with their support staff, colleagues, and supervisors. This is not surprising since these individuals often accept administrative positions because of their desire to positively impact the lives of students, faculty, and staff they serve (Nguyen, 2014).

Several researchers suggested that community college deans, like other mid-level leaders, also play a critical role in leading change and innovation (Nguyen, 2014; McNair & Perry, 2020; Rentsch, 2018). To facilitate organizational change successfully, deans serve as interpreters by communicating and translating messages in multiple directions (Rentsch, 2018). They are crucial in implementing strategic planning by senior administration (De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009).

Important Skills, Traits, and Competencies

To be effective mid-level administrators, deans may need to be competent in multiple areas and have strong communication and interpersonal skills (Bray, 2008; De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Knirk, 2013; Sill, 2014; Yamamura, 2018). Some scholars suggested they needed the ability to self-manage, have a positive mindset, and employ critical thinking and

decision-making (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019; Rentsch, 2018). Other scholars believed deans were also required to have a broader view of the institution, understand the institutional culture and its psychological and social environment, and navigate the campus's internal politics (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019; Bray, 2008; Knirk, 2013; Nguyen, 2014; Rentsch, 2018; Yamamura, 2018).

The researchers agree that entrepreneurial thinking is becoming an essential part of a dean's job duties (Cleverley-Thompson, 2016; McClure & Teitelbaum, 2016). Academic deans were encouraged to develop entrepreneurial skills to adapt to increased competition, financial challenges, and an increased role of online learning and technology in higher education (Cleverley-Thompson, 2016). Knirk (2013) found that passion for student success and emotional fortitude, along with strong management and organizational skills, such as budgeting and scheduling, were also very important. At the same time, being emotionally balanced helped community college deans tolerate ambiguity and handle criticism or other hurtful personal experiences (Knirk, 2013).

Challenges

A robust body of literature identified challenges that deans experience in their positions. Mid-level administrators must effectively combine academic expertise and managerial experience to lead effectively (De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Knirk, 2013). However, balancing these two realms can be challenging for community college administrators, mainly because of the increasing dominance of managerial values that often conflict with professional and academic values (Ayers, 2009; De Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; McClure & Teitelbaum, 2016).

The results of Ayers's (2009) study showed that many community college administrators

found themselves pressured by interinstitutional forces to exhibit a market-oriented behavior in a variety of ethical issues. Although some acquiesced to this pressure, most resisted by advocating for their values and professional autonomy through discourses of ethics, academic standards, and educational goals. In some cases, administrators resisted pressure from above through insubordination (Ayers, 2009).

Scholars also noted that increased responsibilities of the manager-dean could pull these administrators away from their traditional responsibilities, such as supporting faculty members to improve education quality (McClure & Teitelbaum, 2016; Stark, 2019). Stark (2019) warned that deans' focus on strategic priorities and administrative demands might distance them from the interactions and perspectives related to teaching and learning and result in disengagement from the critical mission of transforming students' lives through teaching. Additionally, the need for market-like behavior is "physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting" (McClure & Teitelbaum, 2016, p. 804). This may lead to increased discomfort at the workplace, dissatisfaction with the job, and ultimately high turnover (McClure & Teitelbaum, 2016; Wolverton & Poch, 2000).

Multiple scholars found that the challenge of working between the competing interests of faculty and senior administration added additional pressure on instructional deans (Bray, 2008; Nguyen, 2014; Rentsch, 2018; Sill, 2014; Yamamura, 2018). Although many deans reach their ranks through faculty positions and training (Bray, 2008; Knirk, 2013; Yamamura, 2018), faculty often perceive deans as belonging to the "dark side" once they start engaging with senior administration (Knirk, 2013; McManus, 2013; Sill, 2014; Stark, 2019). Faculty-to-dean transitions are often accompanied by a shift in interpersonal relationships with former faculty colleagues (Knirk, 2013; McManus, 2013). Deans confessed to losing friendships and

established relationships resulting in disappointment, frustration, and the need to rebuild the climate of trust (Knirk, 2013; McManus, 2013).

Yamamura (2018) found that dealing with faculty, including increasing their motivation and cooperation, encouraging innovation and change, and managing their behavior, was one of the greatest challenges of community college deans. Another challenge was increasing job demand (Knirk, 2013; Nguyen, 2014; McClure & Teitelbaum, 2016; Yamamura, 2018). Although the mid-level position of these individuals required a strategic approach to an institutional unit and planning, they often found themselves resolving operational issues, such as addressing student issues that escalated to their level, audit issues, and approvals (Nguyen, 2014).

Adams-Dunford et al. (2019) identified three main misconceptions about mid-level administrators (a) they have a clear understanding of their role, (b) they have the power and authority to influence policy decisions, and (c) they possess the required knowledge and skills to perform their duties. Unfortunately, the research shows that the reality is very different. Scholars found that these administrators balanced great responsibility while lacking the full authority to make decisions (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019; Knirk, 2013; Reed, 2013; Sill, 2014). Often deans did not receive any formal training or mentorship for the deanship position; therefore, on-the-job training was the most common way of acquiring needed competencies and skills (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019; Fang & Mainous, 2019; Knirk, 2013; McManus, 2013; Nguyen, 2014; Sill, 2014; Wolverton & Poch, 2000; Yamamura, 2018). Sill (2014) found that it takes three years on average for deans to become competent in their positions. Moreover, despite understanding the learning curve, they are required to perform at their very best in the first week they step into the position (Nguyen, 2014; Sill, 2014).

Many community college academic deans reported being under high or extreme stress (Rentsch, 2018; Yamamura, 2018). Only a few participants in Yamamura's (2018) study reported having an appropriate balance between work and personal life. Many noted that their deanship experience was worse than they had envisioned prior to assuming dean positions. Nevertheless, despite the high stress, over half reported being very or extremely satisfied with their positions (Yamamura, 2018).

Difficult Decision-Making

Considering the importance of deans' roles and responsibilities, it is essential that these administrators make quality decisions. Scholars have stressed the need for data-driven decision-making at all community college areas for increased accountability, institutional effectiveness, and continuous improvement in student performance (DeJear, 2016; Monaghan, 2017). However, believing that individuals always make decisions with deliberative thought and analysis could be presumptuous as in making decisions people often rely on feelings and emotions, intuition, social and cultural influences, and situational pressures (Haidt, 2001; Robinson & Donald, 2015; Soltes, 2017).

Making information-based decisions and using logic can be particularly challenging when options are complex and involve multiple risks and benefits. In this study, I refer to these decisions as "difficult," "challenging," or "complex." Boggs and McPhail (2020) pointed out that mid-level leaders often face such situations due to the complex, diverse, and multifaceted nature of the community college environment. Therefore, many issues require "more intricate and careful thought and preparation" (Boggs & McPhail, 2020, p. 12). When discussing internal institutional issues, they noted:

Even a seemingly trivial decision such as the assignment of offices or classroom space

can cause dissension. Decisions by an administrator in one area of a college might create issues for a midlevel leader in another area. Perceptions of fairness – or lack of it – can ultimately affect campus climate. (Boggs & McPhail, 2020, p. 13)

Hornak and Garza Mitchell (2016) pointed out that decisions become more complex when community college leaders are forced to balance the needs of various stakeholders and their own vision and values while working with constrained resources. They found that many difficult decisions that community college presidents faced were related to financial issues, enrollment, and program offerings. Some of the difficult decisions were unpopular or controversial. One of the presidents shared that making personnel decisions concerning individuals with whom one has worked for a long time may complicate the decision-making process. The findings also showed that when making difficult decisions the presidents relied heavily on their emotions, experiences, preferences, and personal values and then looked for data to support their decisions. In sum, community college presidents made decisions "based on intuitive rather than rational processes" (Hornak & Garza Mitchell, 2016, p. 132).

These findings are consistent with the findings reported by Garza Mitchell (2012). Garza Mitchell (2012) found that the ethical perspectives of college presidents varied greatly and influenced the presidents' leadership styles and the way they made decisions. The research showed that although all presidents believed in the importance of adhering to the college's mission in making decisions, their personal values and ethical code influenced the way they interpreted the mission and their role in the college's decision-making process (Garza Mitchell, 2012). Consequently, the researchers suggested the importance for leaders to understand and communicate their core values, beliefs, and leadership philosophies to ensure a proper fit with organizational values for ethical decision-making (Garza Mitchell, 2012; Gonzales, 2019;

Hornak & Garza Mitchell, 2016).

Although not all decision-making in a community college setting involves ethical impact, difficult decisions often include ethical dilemmas in which community college leaders must make a tough decision in a situation with no obvious right choice (Gonzales, 2019; Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Smith & Fox, 2019). Such situations often cause a lot of stress and inhibit individuals from considering all the consequences that stem from their decisions (Snyder, 2016). Under pressure, the benefits of unethical behavior seem less costly than the immediate serious implications of ethical decisions, such as disciplinary action and termination (Snyder, 2016). Pressed by time and incentives, individuals often diverge from their values without realizing it and may act unethically (Soltes, 2017).

Smith and Fox (2019) found that navigating such decisions in an era of technology when decisions are more transparent than ever before can add additional challenges. With quick exposure to criticism, community college leaders need to be ready to defend their decisions in the public light (Smith & Fox, 2019). Similarly, Maslin-Ostrowski and et. al (2010) found that the immediacy of media reporting in the digital world may have serious implications for the reputation of community college presidents and other institutional leaders. The presidents in the study confessed to painful experiences of being digitally stalked, having their identities and integrity challenged, and being a target of cyber-attacks. They warned about the dangers of "being misinterpreted, misunderstood, and misrepresented" in the new media sources where the information could spread almost instantaneously without any regard for veracity (p. 36).

Similarly, the Mid-Atlantic presidents in Trent and Pollard's (2019) study mentioned the importance of the ability to justify one's decisions and highlighted the value of transparency in decision-making. "People have the right to understand why you make a decision" (Trent &

Pollard, 2019, p. 69). Like in Garza Mitchell's (2012) study, the Mid-Atlantic presidents believed that institutional mission, vision, and values should guide all decisions; therefore, communicating them openly to various stakeholders was a critical part of the ethical decision-making process. The presidents also mentioned the need to model ethical decision-making and formalize it across college campuses.

In addressing ethical dilemmas, researchers called community college leaders to consider the situations from various ethical lenses and ethical decision-making frameworks (Anderson & Davies, 2000; Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Wood & Hilton, 2012). Wood and Hilton (2012) encouraged community college leaders to employ ethical paradigms when making decisions. In addition to well-known paradigms of ethics of justice, ethic of critique, ethic of care, and ethic of the profession, they proposed an additional paradigm of the ethic of local community. Wood and Hilton (2012) believed that the ethic of local community was consistent with the community college mission of serving the needs and interests of local communities. They argued that by situating the best interests of local community as a focal point of decision-making community college leaders could address the unique local needs.

Oliver and Hioco (2012) proposed an ethical decision-making framework for community college administrators. The framework expanded on Fisher's (2001) six-step model for decision-making and included nine sequential questions representing nine steps in the framework. They believed the framework could guide community college administrators in making decisions in complex decision-making environments.

Middle Managers' Decision-Making

The community college organizational culture, direct superiors, and the nature of mid-level leadership work have a substantial impact on middle managers' decision-making processes

(Burns, 2008; Knirk, 2013). Burns (2008) found that middle managers' decision-making challenges stem from internal conflict related to the lack of policy and practical guidance for ethical decision-making. The lack of written policies, the disconnect between policy and practice, and campus politics caused discomfort in administrators' decision-making, especially in decisions concerning personnel issues, diversity, and legal matters. The administrators viewed the policy as lacking dynamic and adequate development, especially considering the complexity of their institutions; thus, it restricted their ability to make ethically sound decisions in one area without causing problems in the other. Making personnel decisions was particularly challenging in the presence of labor unions. The complexity of the organization, characterized by the disconnect between various college departments and contradicting college purposes, allowed for the interpretation of decisions from multiple perspectives, which further complicated the decision-making process.

Researchers have also found that maintaining a balance between various institutional constituents and advocating for the needs of multiple groups (students, faculty, administration, and institution) was a challenging task for mid-level administrators (Burns, 2008; Rentsch, 2018; Yamamura, 2018). Although these individuals lacked the authority to make the ultimate decisions, including those related to personnel issues, they had considerable responsibility and influenced the outcomes of decision-making processes (Burns, 2008; Knirk, 2013; Rentsch, 2018). In Burns (2008), for example, administrators were forced to make decisions that benefited the organization but contradicted their values (Burns, 2008). Many confirmed the lack of training for their leadership roles and ethical decision-making. Knirk (2013) and Yamamura (2018) describe similar findings.

Mid-level community college administrators in Herndon's (2015) study shared their

struggles and fears of making ethical decisions because of the people involved, unknown consequences, and limited decision-making powers. They confessed that ethical decisions were often made based on the situation, circumstance, and people involved. Despite the desire to do the right thing, sometimes the administrators felt pressure to go against their will as the decisions were not favorable for certain parties; therefore, they needed the courage to do what was right.

The Impact of Community College Setting on Decision-Making

A community college setting may pose unique challenges to administrators' decision-making process. Like community college leaders in suburban and rural areas, administrators in urban areas must address challenges related to fiscal limitations, lack of resources, limited infrastructure, technology, and politics. However, leaders in these institutions may also deal with multifaceted issues related to the urban environment, such as low-quality housing, low food access and health, abandoned buildings, and noise and air pollution (Kaiser et al., 2020). Many urban areas combat crime, segregation, economic isolation, substance abuse, trash, and illegal dumping, all impacting individual and community well-being (Kaiser et al., 2020; Myran & Parsons, 2013). Beyond addressing these challenges, leaders at urban institutions are also expected to be at the front line of social change, economic transformation, and innovation (Myran & Parsons, 2013). Female leaders at urban institutions may face additional challenges related to work-life balance, lack of mentorship, and communication challenges (Hardy et al., 2021). Hardy et al. (2021) found that mid-level women leaders in urban community colleges tend to second-guess themselves in expressing opinions and making decisions due to the fear of being judged.

Educational leaders in rural locations face different challenges. Compared to their urban and suburban counterparts, they often lack anonymity and personal space as they are more

recognizable because there are fewer residents in these areas (Eddy, 2007; Olsen, 2017). Lack of privacy makes it more challenging to keep their professional and personal lives separate (Olsen, 2017). Moreover, rural locations limit the social network available to educational leaders, leading to feelings of loneliness and frustration (Eddy, 2007; Harkins, 2017; Olsen, 2016). The need to perform multiple roles within a smaller community infrastructure and maintain relationships with multiple community members leads to receiving more attention when dealing with challenging issues compared to educational leaders in more populated locations (Eddy, 2007; Eddy, 2013; Harkins, 2017; Olsen, 2016).

Family ties between college employees and students also exacerbate communication, confidentiality issues, and decision-making in rural community colleges (Eddy, 2013). One community college leader in Eddy's (2013) study noted: "You can be absolutely sure that every single living body on the campus knows every single thing about every other living body on campus." (p. 25) On the one hand, building relational trust with others and learning the interconnected system contribute to establishing credibility and effective leadership, promoting goals completion and achievement of community and institutional priorities (Olsen, 2017; Thompson, 2016; Wrysinski-Guden, 2014). On the other hand, breaking trust with community members may have severe implications for personal reputation, relationships, and potentially career, given that promotions in rural community colleges occur from within (Eddy, 2013).

Emotional Intelligence: Early Stage

Although emotions have been considered disruptive to cognitive processing and decision-making for a long time, over the last few decades, researchers have argued that emotions could help individuals guide their cognitive activities and subsequent actions instead of inhibiting them (Salovey, 2010). Emotional intelligence has emerged as an important construct linking emotions

and cognition (Payne, 1986; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) were the first to formally introduce the concept of "emotional intelligence" in their seminal article *Emotional Intelligence. Imagination, Cognition and Personality* (Bracket et al., 2011; Goleman, 2005). They defined emotional intelligence "as the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189).

Fitting emotional intelligence within conceptual definitions of intelligence, Salovey and Mayer (1990) conceptualized it as a set of three related mental processes involving emotional information. The first process, appraising and expressing emotions in the self and others, included the abilities of individuals to accurately perceive their own emotions, express them to others, recognize the emotions of others, and respond to them appropriately. The second process included the regulation of emotion in self and others. According to Salovey and Mayer, emotionally intelligent individuals monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own emotions as well as regulate and alter the reactions to the emotions of other people. Finally, the third process involved using emotions in adaptive ways. In other words, emotionally intelligent people control their emotions, which allows them to plan, solve problems, think critically, redirect their attention, and motivate themselves. Salovey and Mayer believed these skills were necessary for appropriate social interactions, positively impacted individuals' well-being, and allowed people to live fulfilling lives.

Since the publication of this first article, Salovey, Mayer, and their colleague and business consultant David Caruso continued promoting emotional intelligence as a standard intelligence, ensuring the acceptance of the concept among the scholarly community (Mayer et al., 2001, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016). Mayer et al., (2002) formulated a plausible theory of

emotional intelligence and developed a rigorous measure of this capacity. However, the term did not gain popularity in the general public until Daniel Goleman's (1995) groundbreaking book, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (Brackett et al., 2011). Inspired by the notion of emotional intelligence formulated by Salovey and Mayer, Goleman (1995) synthesized findings from multiple research areas and put emotional intelligence at the center of human aptitudes necessary for fulfillment in all life areas, including relationships, career, and physical health. With the book translated into 40 languages (Goleman, 2021), the concept of emotional intelligence has spread worldwide and has been embraced and criticized by communities of educators, businesspeople, religious leaders, and beyond.

Classification of Emotional Intelligence

The popularization of emotional intelligence among academics and practitioners after the publication of Goleman's (1995) book led to its incorporation into daily practices across multiple professions (Brackett et al., 2011). Along with this process began the development of various models of emotional intelligence characterized by a lack of consensus in its definition and measures (Brackett et al., 2011; Uhrich et al., 2021). Considering multiple theoretical developments in the conceptualization of emotional intelligence, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000) suggested distinguishing between the ability model of emotional intelligence and mixed models. Based on the ability model, emotional intelligence is a cognitive ability. Mixed models, on the other hand, incorporate a wide range of personality traits, competencies, and social skills (Mayer et al., 2000).

As a response to the debate on the measurement methodology, Petrides and Furnham (2000) proposed differentiating emotional intelligence in broader terms. They classified emotional intelligence into trait emotional intelligence and ability emotional intelligence defined

by how emotional intelligence is measured. Based on this classification method, ability emotional intelligence is measured by tests of maximal performance, while trait emotional intelligence assessments are based on self-report items (Petrides & Furnham, 2000).

Ashkanasy and Daus (2005) proposed another method of classifying emotional intelligence. They suggested that there are three streams of research on emotional intelligence based on the instrument type: (1) ability assessments based on the Mayer-Salovey emotional intelligence model, (2) self-report tests based on the Mayer-Salovey representation, and (3) expanded tests that encompass components not included in the Mayer-Salovey's model. The third stream is also referred to as "trait emotional intelligence" or "mixed models emotional intelligence" because of the inclusion of traditional social skills in emotional intelligence assessment (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Using the Ashkanasy and Daus (2005) classification method, I will further describe each stream of research on emotional intelligence in more detail.

Stream I: Ability Emotional Intelligence

The founders of the ability model view emotional intelligence as the capacity to reason about emotions and use emotions to assist cognition (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2004, 2008, 2016; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). According to the model, emotional intelligence includes the abilities to (a) perceive emotions, (b) use emotion to facilitate thought, (c) understand emotions, and (d) manage emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Mayer et al., 2016). The four abilities (branches) of the model form a hierarchy in which emotional perception is situated at the bottom and emotion management is at the top (Mayer et al., 2016). Each branch consists of skills that progress from more basic to more sophisticated (Mayer et al., 2016).

In the ability model, emotional intelligence is not a soft skill or a personality trait, but intelligence that meets three criteria of a standard intelligence: (a) it is operationalized as mental

ability, (b) it shows correlational patterns indicating it is a unitary ability similar enough but distinct from other intelligences and personality dispositions measured earlier, and (c) it exhibits growth with age similar to other intelligences (Caruso et al., 2015; Mayer et al., 2000, 2004). Additionally, emotional intelligence is one of the broad intelligences according to the Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) three-stratum taxonomy of human cognitive abilities used to select, organize, and interpret intelligence and cognitive abilities tests (Mayer et al., 2016). According to the CHC model, general intelligence (g) is at the top of the hierarchy (McGrew, 2009). At the second stratum, general intelligence is divided into a series of broad abilities such as fluid reasoning, comprehension knowledge, short-term memory, visual processing, and other ability domains (McGrew, 2009). More specific (narrow) mental abilities form the third, lowest stratum of the hierarchy (McGrew, 2009). Emotional intelligence, involved in emotional reasoning, fits well among other broad intelligences described in the model (Evans et al., 2020; Legree et al., 2014, 2016; MacCann et al., 2014).

Furthermore, emotional intelligence, along with social and personal intelligence, is a hot intelligence as it involves reasoning with the information significant to individuals (Mayer et al., 2016). Since such information has personal relevance and includes individuals' emotions, self-esteem, and social relations or, in other words, can "make one's blood boil - hence *hot*" (Mayer et al., 2012, p. 502). Traditional, cool intelligences such as verbal-comprehension and perceptual-organizational intelligences do not have a direct personal impact as they concern impersonal features of information (Mayer et al., 2004, 2016; Schneider et al., 2016).

Assessing Ability Emotional Intelligence

The assessments measuring ability emotional intelligence are very different from the self-report measures of emotional intelligence. They assess individuals' maximum performance - the

way they perform at their best under certain conditions - rather than their typical performance

(Fiori et al., 2014). Such performance-based emotional intelligence assessment employs the

criteria for correctness (Brackett et al., 2011). Therefore, actual emotional intelligence ability,

not poor self-reported estimates influenced by levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and wishful

thinking, can be determined (Mayer et al., 2016). The correct answers are determined according

to the response chosen by most people or by using expert-based scoring (Mayer et al., 2003,

2016). The assessments consist of questions similar to those found in IQ tests, and they require

individuals to solve emotion-related problems (O'Connor et al., 2019).

Among a few available ability emotional intelligence assessments, the latest version of

the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) is the most well-known as,

for a long time, it was the only assessment covering all four branches of the ability model

(Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). The first version of the test, the Multi-Factor Emotional

Intelligence Scale (MEIS), was developed in 1999 (Mayer et al., 2000). Since then, the authors

have revisited the test and the theoretical aspects of the ability model (Mayer et al., 2001, 2003,

2016). The most recent version of the test (MSCEIT V2.0) reflects the four-branch ability

emotional intelligence model and consists of eight tasks, two for each of the four branches

(Caruso et al., 2015). Despite the MSCEIT's limitations (Fiori et al., 2014; Legree et al., 2014;

MacCann et al., 2014; Maul, 2012; Roberts et al., 2006, 2010), the test remains the most

researched and supported scale of ability emotional intelligence (O'Connor et al., 2019).

Other ability emotional intelligence scales include the Situational Test of Emotion

Management (STEM), Situational Test of Emotional Understanding (STEU), and Diagnostics

Analysis of Non-Verbal Accuracy (DANVA) (see O'Connor et al., 2019 for review). However,

these tests measure only some aspects of emotional intelligence, not the broad ability emotional

intelligence construct (O'Connor et al., 2019). The North Dakota Emotional Abilities Test (Krishnakumar et al., 2016) and the Geneva Emotional Competence Test (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019) are other, relatively new ability emotional intelligence tests developed specifically for workplace contexts. Both tests appear as promising measures of ability emotional intelligence shown to predict various workplace outcomes such as engagement in constructive conflict resolution strategies and helping behavior in the workplace (Krishnakumar et al. 2019a), higher ability to refrain from deviant interpersonal and organizational behaviors (Robinson et al., 2019), better job performance and greater discipline (Krishnakumar et al., 2019b), higher ability to tolerate negative job effects without exhibiting counterproductive work behaviors (Krishnakumar et al. 2017), as well as income and professional success (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

Stream II: Self-Report Ability Emotional Intelligence

The scholars supporting the second stream adopt the Mayer-Salovey ability model as the foundation of their research but use self-report or peer-assessment measures of emotional intelligence abilities (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005). They believe emotional intelligence determines the quality of job performance and is associated with other effective outcomes of the work environment (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Khosravi et al., 2020; Maqbool et al., 2017). Among the limited measures of self-report ability emotional intelligence is the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale developed for research on the workplace, particularly in leadership and management studies (Wong & Law, 2002). The scale is a self-report measure consisting of 16 items used to assess four dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-emotional appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, regulation of emotion, and use of emotion (Wong & Law, 2002). Scholars point out that they choose the test over other emotional intelligence assessments due to its shortness, conciseness, simple language, and replicability (Maamari & Majdalani, 2016).

Stream III: Expanded Models of Emotional Intelligence

Researchers supporting the stream III approach conceptualize emotional intelligence as a broad set of traits, capabilities, and personal characteristics beyond the Mayer-Salovey model (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005). These models of emotional intelligence often overlap with traditional personality measures (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005). Like the stream II models, stream III models rely on self-report measures (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005).

Trait Emotional Intelligence

Trait emotional intelligence, falling within the third stream, is described as a set of "emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies" (Petrides et al., 2007, p. 26). Supporters of this model believe that trait emotional intelligence or trait emotional self-efficacy lies outside the taxonomy of cognitive ability and recognizes the innate subjective nature of emotional experience (Petrides, 2010; Petrides et al., 2007, 2016). From the trait model perspective, emotional intelligence is conceptualized as the quality of individuals embedded within the personality domain (Petrides, 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Smith et al., 2015). Hence, it is assessed, like other personality traits, using self-report instruments instead of performance measures with right and wrong answers (Petrides, 2010). The research on trait emotional intelligence points out that differences in trait emotional intelligence, similarly to other individual personality traits, stem from biological differences (Petrides et al., 2016; Vernon et al., 2008).

Mixed Emotional Intelligence

Mixed models of emotional intelligence are often classified as belonging to the same research stream as trait models. However, these models are explicitly called "mixed" because, along with self-report measures, they may include 360-degree forms of assessment, such as peer

reports from supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates (O'Connor et al., 2019). Among the most popular mixed models are those proposed by Goleman (1995) and Bar-On (1997). Goleman's (1995, 1998) mixed-model framework consists of four fundamentals of emotional intelligence - self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and the ability to manage relationships. The Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (Hay Group, 2011) measures emotional intelligence based on this model. This scale, which includes ratings by self, peer, and supervisor, provides a 360-degree assessment of twelve competencies that fall into four main categories of the model (Hay Group, 2011).

Another popular framework of mixed-model emotional intelligence is by Bar-On (1997). Bar-On defined emotional intelligence as a set of "non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures" (p. 14). Bar-On is the author of one of the most widely used assessments of the trait or mixed-model emotional intelligence - the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i). EQ-i is a self-report scale consisting of 15 components measuring five aspects of emotional intelligence: intrapersonal functioning, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood (Bar-On, 1997). The test can be administered in a long or short version to adults 17 years or older (Siegling et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Since I am interested in exploring deans' emotional intelligence ability rather than their emotional self-efficacy, the modified version of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso (2016) four-branch ability model of emotional intelligence developed by Schlegel and Mortillaro (2019) serves as a theoretical framework for this study. Similar to the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model, the developers of the present model view emotional intelligence as a mental ability that is best measured using

tests with right and wrong answers (Mayer et al., 2016; Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). The modified ability model delineates emotional intelligence into four related problem-solving areas: (a) emotion recognition ability, (b) emotion understanding, (c) emotion regulation in oneself, and (d) emotion management (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Dissimilar to the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso (2016) ability model, the modified model does not include an emotion facilitation branch because of the evidence of conceptual and empirical redundancies (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Additionally, based on research on emotion regulation pointing to two distinct areas of reasoning (intra- and interpersonal emotion regulation), the researchers divided the original emotion management branch into two components: emotion regulation (ability to manage one's emotions) and emotion management (ability to measure other people's emotions) (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

Emotion Recognition Ability

The first, the most basic component of the model, is emotion recognition ability, defined as "the ability to accurately recognize emotions from other people's nonverbal expressions conveyed by face, voice, and body" (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019, p. 562). Emotions contain important information about individuals and their world, including their intentions, attitudes, and relationships (Caruso, 2004; Schlegel, 2020). Individuals may express this information through nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures (Schlegel, 2020). Those able to accurately recognize these nonverbal signals can decode and anticipate others' intentions and thoughts and adjust their own responses and actions as needed (Caruso, 2004; Schlegel, 2020). These individuals can also judge the personality of others more accurately (Jaksic & Schlegel, 2020). Therefore, accurately recognizing the emotional states of others is crucial for social interactions as it allows one to develop deep connections with other individuals and

achieve one's interpersonal goals (Caruso, 2004; Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

Emotion Understanding

Emotion understanding is another ability needed to gather accurate information about individuals' emotional states. Along with emotion recognition, this ability is heavily based on knowledge and is defined as "the ability to accurately appraise the features of a situation, including their quality and timing, to infer another (unknown) person's emotional state" (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019, p. 562). Understanding emotional transitions, describing differences between various emotions, and understanding what leads to different emotions helps to connect emotions with various situations and understand why people feel the way they feel (Caruso, 2004).

Emotion Regulation in Oneself

Emotion regulation is one of the two behavioral components of the model. It is the ability to use various cognitive strategies to regulate one's emotions to achieve the desired outcomes (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Regulating one's emotions, whether it is staying open to them or disengaging from them, means judging emotions without being influenced by them (Caruso, 2004). Individuals who are capable of regulating their emotions use the information that emotions contain to enhance their thinking; therefore, they can make more effective decisions leading to a more prosperous and fulfilling life (Caruso, 2004).

Emotion Management

In the workplace, it is common for individuals to exhibit negative or socially undesirable positive affective emotional states (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Negative emotions often originate from conflicts stemming from different or incompatible goals and perceptions (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Ethically inappropriate positive affective states, such as

schadenfreude (malicious joy of others' misfortune), can also occur in the workplace when individuals believe the troubles of others are deserved (Dasborough & Harvey, 2017). Therefore, selecting appropriate behavioral strategies to regulate the emotions of others is of high importance for social relations in the workplace setting (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Since the same behavioral strategy may not be effective in all contexts and situations, emotion management is defined as "the ability to effectively respond to the emotion of another individual by choosing the behavioral strategy that is most effective in the specific situation" (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019, p. 563). Considering that emotion management, similar to emotional regulation in oneself, is a behaviorally oriented component, it is best measured with questions assessing one's outward actions in interpersonal situations involving conflicts (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

Emotional Intelligence Outcomes

Emotional intelligence plays a vital role in our everyday lives. It is related to a wide array of health and well-being outcomes, social functioning, workplace performance, and various quality-of-life indices (Brackett et al., 2011; Zeidner et al., 2012). Research suggests that emotionally intelligent individuals may be higher performing, more committed to their organizations, and may show greater job satisfaction and fewer turnover intentions than those with lower levels of emotional intelligence (O'Boyle et al., 2011; Maamari & Majdalani, 2016; Miao et al., 2017). They are also less likely to engage in service sabotage and other dysfunctional behaviors (Yun-Tsan & Ti-Chih, 2017; Zeidner et al., 2012).

Emotional intelligence is a crucial ingredient in leadership effectiveness. Multiple scholars found that managers employing emotional intelligence built meaningful relationships and trust with their employees, provided rewards, recognition, and motivation that subordinates

sought, and improved their job performance (Côté, 2017; Du Plessis et al., 2015; Khosravi et al., 2020; Maamari & Majdalani, 2016; Waglay et al., 2020). Research suggests that when led by emotionally savvy administrators, subordinates are more satisfied with their jobs (Miao et al., 2016; Jha & Bhattacharya, 2020). Mysirlaki and Paraskeva (2020) found that in a virtual setting, leaders' emotional intelligence positively affects team effectiveness, including team member satisfaction, team viability, and team performance. Through stronger relationships with their followers, emotionally intelligent leaders may be more successful in implementing change in their organizations (Issah, 2018).

Dark Side of Emotional Intelligence

Despite the superior emotional knowledge, awareness, and regulatory abilities that emotional intelligence skills provide, a growing body of literature shows that high emotional intelligence, regardless of the type (trait or ability), could have a dark side and can even be harmful to a person (Akamatsu & Gherghel, 2021; Davis & Nichols, 2016; Lubbadeh, 2020; Nagler et al., 2014; Ngoc et al., 2020). The ability to positively manage the emotions of others and maintain harmony and trust between individuals also comes with the ability to use these skills in dishonest ways for one's advantage (Lubbadeh, 2020).

Evidence shows that high emotional intelligence could be linked with emotional distortion and various antisocial behaviors (Akamatsu & Gherghel, 2021; Davis & Nichols, 2016; Hyde et al., 2020). Thus, individuals with high emotional intelligence could dominate the feelings of others and manipulate them to promote their own interests and advancement (Lubbadeh, 2020). However, an increasing number of studies show that using emotional intelligence skills in unethical ways depends on various personal factors that serve as antecedents to unethical and antisocial behavior. Among these factors are dark personality traits

(psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism) (Davis & Nichols, 2016; Lubbadeh, 2020; Nagler et al., 2014), gender (Bacon et al., 2014; Bacon & Regan, 2016; Ngoc et al., 2020; Hyde et al., 2020), emotional empathy deficit and moral identity (Akamatsu & Gherghel, 2021).

 High levels of emotional intelligence, particularly emotion awareness and management, may also lead to the inability to make decisions when the feelings of others are involved (Davis & Nichols, 2016; Lubbadeh, 2020). Such hyper-awareness of others' negative emotions may adversely impact individuals' psychological health and lead to stress, burnout, and depression (Davis & Nichols, 2016; Lubbadeh, 2020). Therefore, Davis and Nichols (2016) suggested optimal levels of emotional intelligence were beneficial for individuals.

Emotional Intelligence and Culture

Some researchers (Gunkel et al., 2014; Gunkel et al., 2016; Pathak and Muralidharan, 2020) suggested that the development of emotional intelligence may be affected by cultural norms and values. Thus, being emotionally intelligent in one culture does not necessarily translate into being emotionally intelligent in another (Gunkel et al., 2014). Pathak and Muralidharan (2020) argued that emotional intelligence should be viewed as culture-specific because cultural values and norms influence the way individuals behave in a society. The beliefs surrounding emotions determine how emotions are appraised, recognized, and expressed and what is culturally acceptable in these processes. Pathak and Muralidharan (2020) suggested that emotional recognition and management, two key dimensions of emotional intelligence, are culturally implicit as they are embedded in larger social and cultural contexts.

Gunkel et al. (2014) examined the influence of culture on emotional intelligence by surveying business students in nine countries. After applying Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of culture (individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, power distance, uncertainty

avoidance, and short-term vs. long-term orientation) and analyzing their influence on self-emotional appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, use of emotion, and emotion regulation, they found that collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation were positively related with four dimensions of emotional intelligence. Their findings suggest that the development of emotional intelligence may be affected by cultural norms and values.

In examining the effects of cultural values on conflict-handling styles through emotional intelligence, Gunkel et al. (2016) found that emotional intelligence partially mediated the influence of Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions on individuals' preferences for conflict-handling styles. Their findings confirmed the findings of a previous study (Gunkel et al., 2014) showing that collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation predicted emotional intelligence. However, contrary to the Gunkel et al. (2014) study, Gunkel et al. (2016) found a negative relationship between collectivism and emotional intelligence. The findings also showed that a positive relationship existed between emotional intelligence and the integrating, obliging, and compromising styles of conflict handling.

Self-Report Emotional Intelligence and Decision-Making

Numerous scholars have documented the relationship between emotional intelligence and decision-making. However, the research on emotional intelligence and decision-making has primarily employed self-report measures of emotional intelligence (those corresponding to streams II and III described above). Within stream II and stream III, studies have shown a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making (Angelidis & Ibrahim, 2011; Hopkins & Deepa, 2018; Scott, 2004). Since emotionally intelligent individuals can better recognize the emotions and societal norms affecting their ethical judgments, they are more likely to make decisions with positive consequences for all involved (Angelidis & Ibrahim,

2011; Hopkins & Deepa, 2018). Alkozei et al. (2016) found that emotional intelligence also impacted social decision-making. Individuals with a higher ability to understand the emotions of self and others and use this knowledge to facilitate cognitive processes could better integrate facial social cues into their decision-making and make more reliable and certain decisions (Alkozei et al., 2016).

Ability Emotional Intelligence and Decision-Making

As mentioned in the previous section, most research on emotional intelligence and decision-making has focused on the trait or mixed conceptualization of emotional intelligence. Thus, the scholars measured the impact of emotional self-efficacy or perceived emotional intelligence on decision-making rather than actual emotional intelligence ability. To date, studies examining the link between emotional intelligence as mental ability (stream I) and decision-making have been limited. This section outlines the research focusing on the ability emotional intelligence and decision-making published in peer-reviewed journals from 2011 until 2021.

The relationship between ability emotional intelligence and career decision-making was investigated in three studies (Dahl & Cilliers, 2012; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011; Puffer, 2011). Dahl and Cilliers (2012) found no relationship between any branch of emotional intelligence and change in negative career thinking among Canadian unemployed, non-student adults attending a community-based career exploration program. However, the ability to manage emotions was associated with fewer negative thoughts both prior to and after career exploration (Dahl & Cilliers, 2012).

Di Fabio and Kenny (2011) and Puffer (2011) found that emotional intelligence was related to indecisiveness; however, the type of this relation is yet to be determined. Di Fabio and Kenny (2011) found that in the Italian context, increased emotional intelligence facilitated the

use of information in career decision-making; thus, reducing career decision difficulties related to lack of information. However, the results of Puffer's (2011) study with Midwestern university students revealed gender differences in the impact of various emotional intelligence competencies on career-decision making. For women, a high level of emotion regulation ability predicted higher indecisiveness. For men, a higher emotion perception ability was positively associated with less nervousness in career decision-making (Puffer, 2011).

Two studies evaluated the effect of ability emotional intelligence on emotional (Alkozei et al., 2019) and economic or complex decision-making (Ramchandran et al., 2020). Although decision-making in these studies was defined using different terms, scholars in both studies employed the Iowa Gambling Task (IGT). The IGT is a computerized task (card game) mimicking real-world decision-making under conditions of uncertainty (Alkozei et al., 2019). Although the research purposes and contexts of these studies were distinct, the results related to decision-making showed that higher levels of emotional intelligence were associated with superior performance on the decision-making task (Alkozei et al., 2019; Ramchandran et al., 2020). Particularly, participants with higher levels of emotional intelligence showed a quicker rate of learning the advantageous decision-making strategy (Alkozei et al., 2019; Ramchandran et al., 2020).

Checa and Fernández-Berrocal (2019) and Yip et al. (2020) also employed the IGT centered on decision-making. Yip et al. (2020) examined whether emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between skin conductance responses (type of somatic markers stemming from experiencing physiological arousal) and risky decision-making. The results showed that individuals with lower ability emotional intelligence were more likely to positively associate skin conductance responses with risk-taking. On the other hand, individuals with high

emotional intelligence did not exhibit a relationship between the two constructs. Thus, by appraising their psychological signals incorrectly, low-emotional intelligence individuals were more likely to engage in maladaptive decision-making. Overall, the results showed that emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between skin conductance responses and risky decision-making when controlling for cognitive ability (Yip et al., 2020).

Checa and Fernández-Berrocal (2019) examined the role of emotional intelligence level (high versus low) in the execution of two kinds of cognitive tasks, neutral (cool) versus emotional (hot), among Spanish participants. A hot task condition was created by employing the IGT. The cool task was represented by the Flanker task focused on suppressing interfering information. Although there was no difference in the execution of the cool task between the two groups (high and low emotional intelligence), the participants with a high level of emotional intelligence showed superior performance in the execution of the hot task. Thus, the results confirmed that when emotional information is involved, emotional intelligence is associated with better performance (Checa & Fernández-Berrocal, 2019).

Finally, Fernández-Berrocal et al. (2014) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and interpersonal decision-making in university students by employing the MSCEIT and the Prisoner's Dilemma Game. The findings showed that participants with a higher level of emotional intelligence were more likely to compete to advance their interests when other individuals in an interaction context refused to cooperate. At the same time, individuals with high emotional intelligence were not more likely to take advantage of consistently cooperative people than those with lower emotional intelligence. Thus, the researchers concluded that emotional intelligence was associated with the ability to respond flexibly to the interaction context and the strategies of others, including the ability to compete if needed with the purpose

of goal attainment (Fernández-Berrocal et al., 2014).

Emotional Intelligence in Educational Leadership Context

In the discussions of emotional intelligence in an educational leadership context, scholars have argued the need for educational leaders to acknowledge and manage emotion for strong leadership (Freed, 2016; Parrish, 2015; Tenuto et al., 2016). Parrish (2015) explored the relevance of emotional intelligence for effective leadership in a higher education context in a multiple case study. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven university academics from three different universities in Australia. The interviews were conducted pre- and post-leadership capacity development intervention. The results showed that emotional intelligence was highly relevant for academic leadership in higher education. The researcher found empathy, inspiring and guiding others, and managing oneself were the most applicable for leadership in higher education (Parrish, 2015).

Freed (2016) explored the role of emotional intelligence in community college administrators' work. Using the combined version of George's (2000) and Goleman's (2004) models of emotional intelligence as a theoretical framework and a mixed-methods case study research design, Freed analyzed three cases - three community colleges in Washington and Oregon. Leaders at these institutions participated in in-depth interviews with the researcher. Freed also collected artifacts from media and college websites and triangulated the information from all sources. Before the interviews, Freed assessed each participant's emotional intelligence with the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Mayer et al., 2002); however, the qualitative and quantitative data analyses were presented separately. The qualitative data analysis showed that self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, management of others' emotions, and using emotions to enhance cognition were the most common emotional intelligence skills

identified by the participants (Freed, 2016). Among these skills, self-awareness and self-regulation represented the hallmarks of emotional intelligence. Social skills, motivation, and using shifts in emotion to promote flexibility were also evident but less common. Perceiving emotional intelligence as an important component of their work in a community college setting, administrators wished they could learn more about improving their emotional intelligence skills (Freed, 2016).

Tenuto et al. (2016) argued that formal training in leadership does not always prepare administrators for the full range of emotions encountered in their administrative roles. Loneliness and isolation are common among school administrators because of the confidential nature of the issues they are to resolve and the multitude of legal and ethical ramifications they must consider. If not managed properly, emotions can lead to "breaching confidentiality, seeking potentially untrustworthy colleagues for advice, or venting in an unprofessional manner' (p. 23). However, the study of Mazeh (2011) showed that educational leaders lacked the knowledge of and skills related to emotional intelligence. The author concluded the leaders did not fully understand the concept of emotional intelligence and did not know how to apply it in their professional roles (Mazeh, 2011).

Emotional Intelligence and Decision-Making in Educational Leadership Context

A controversial issue has been whether emotional intelligence relates to decision-making in an educational leadership context. On the one hand, the researchers have found that emotional intelligence and decision-making are linked (Harati, 2013; Scott, 2004). Tenuto et al. (2016) argued that through developed emotional intelligence skills, administrators could improve their problem-solving and decision-making and better role model ethical decision-making in complex and challenging situations (Tenuto et al., 2016). On the other hand, no relationship was found

between the two (Torain, 2018; Ellis, 2020). From this perspective, Ellis (2020) and Mazeh (2011) pointed out that in making decisions, leaders adhere to the community college mission of supporting students and the application of institutional policy regardless of the decision's complexity.

Studies Linking Emotional Intelligence and Decision-Making

Harati (2013) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence, measured by the Universiti Sains Malaysia Emotional Quotient Inventory (USMEQ-i), a self-report scale, and ethical decision-making, measured by the Defining Issues Test (DIT-2). The study participants were educational leaders (deans, chairpersons, and directors), registered as members of the Higher Education Publication Incorporation (HEPI) and listed on the Higher Education Directory website. Harati found a statistically significant correlation between emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making and suggested conducting future studies with specific groups of educational leaders, using other instruments, and studies in which subordinates rate their leaders on the dimensions of ethical decision-making and emotional intelligence.

Scott (2004) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and decision-making in 120 students, faculty, and staff of one Mid-South community college. The researcher used the General Emotional Intelligence Scale (GEIS), a self-report assessment, to measure the emotional maturity level of the participants, and the Defining Issues Test 2 (DIT2) to measure ethical decision-making. The study results showed emotional intelligence to be a predictor of ethical decision making with educational attainment (as opposed to age and gender) being a major contributor to emotional intelligence.

Studies Minimizing Importance of Emotional Intelligence for Decision-Making

In contrast to Scott (2004), scholars have found that emotional intelligence was neither

related to nor important for decision-making (Ellis, 2020; Mazeh, 2011; Torain, 2018). Torain

(2018) conducted a study with nine superintendents from a school district in one mid-Atlantic

state in the United States. The researcher assessed emotional intelligence using the Assessing

Emotions Scale (AES), a self-report measure, decision-making using the Adult Decision-Making

Competence scale, and moral reasoning using the Defining Issues Test-2. The results did not

show any relationship between the levels of emotional intelligence and decision-making. Neither

did the researcher find any significant relationship between moral reasoning and decision-

making.

Ellis (2020) sought to understand the impact of emotional intelligence on leadership

capacity in higher education administrators in eastern Tennessee's post-secondary institutions.

The researcher triangulated the data from a survey measuring participants' perceived level of

emotional intelligence; a case study scenario, developed to observe participants' level of

emotional intelligence in decision-making, and open-ended semi-structured interviews. The

results of this phenomenological study showed no direct connection between leadership capacity

and emotional intelligence, particularly in decision-making and organizational commitment. The

participants referenced the adherence to institutional mission and policies in their decision-

making regardless of the situation. The analysis of triangulated data further revealed the study

participants' lack of emotional intelligence (Ellis, 2020).

Need for More Research

Findings by Ellis (2020), Mazeh (2011), and Torain (2018) challenge the assumption of

the importance of emotional intelligence for decision-making in an educational leadership

context and call for more research on the topic in this setting. Considering the importance of an

academic dean's position and the fact that much research on educational leadership in the

community college context focused on senior leaders, targeting the population of academic deans is particularly important. Beyond representing a pool for future community college vice presidents and presidents, these administrators are actively involved in multiple areas of the college including faculty supervision and evaluation, planning, and assessment. They are responsible for leading change and implementing the agenda set by their senior leaders. However, due to their mid-level position, academic deans often lack the authority to make decisions and find themselves between competing interests of different constituencies. Since deans are known to develop close relationships with their colleagues, exploring the ways in which these administrators draw on emotional intelligence in making decisions in complex situations can shed light on the role of emotional intelligence in decision-making in a community college context.

Examining just a few variables in a person's life provides a limited view of how emotional intelligence may be expressed in decision-making. Therefore, conducting a qualitative study allows for a deeper understanding of the unique context of decision-making in an educational setting and provides an intensive description of how emotional intelligence manifests in this process. By selecting only highly emotionally intelligent participants for this study, I ensure that the data on emotional intelligence comes from those who indeed possess the skills. Moreover, since most people tend to overestimate their emotional intelligence (Emotional Intelligence Skills Group, 2021), to select participants, I measure individuals' emotional intelligence ability rather than their own assessment of it, using a scale with right and wrong answers instead of a self-report measure. Therefore, the study will contribute to the field of educational leadership and the existing literature on emotional intelligence by addressing the debate in the literature with a unique approach.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the roles, responsibilities, important skills, traits, and competencies of community college academic deans. The research shows that academic deans in rural community colleges face unique challenges in decision-making stemming from the nature of their mid-level positions and the rural setting of their institutions. The review presented three main streams of research on emotional intelligence. The findings from all streams show that emotional intelligence plays a vital role in our everyday lives and is related to decision-making. However, the research on emotional intelligence and decision-making in the educational leadership context is limited and controversial; thus, pointing to the need for more research on the topic. Conducting a qualitative study will allow for a deeper understanding of the context in which community college academic deans make decisions and the ways emotional intelligence manifests in this process.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case research was to explore the ways highly emotionally intelligent community college academic deans draw on emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions. A qualitative approach was most appropriate as it provided a rich framework for understanding a phenomenon, participants' experiences related to this phenomenon, and the context in which it occurred (Creswell, 2007). A multiple-case study design allowed me to explore and compare multiple cases. The details of the research design are presented in chapter three.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research:

1. What difficult decisions do community college academic deans face in their professional roles?

2. How do highly emotionally intelligent academic deans employ emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions?

Research Paradigm

In exploring the decision-making of community college deans with a high level of emotional intelligence, I took a critical realist perspective. Critical realism emerged in the 1970s and 1980s through the writings of Bhaskar (1978, 1986) as an alternative to both positivism and constructivism (Fletcher, 2017; Roberts, 2014; Zachariadis et al., 2013). Drawing elements from both paradigms, critical realists argued that ontology, or one's assumptions about the nature of reality, does not necessarily lead to epistemology or beliefs of how knowledge is generated (Fletcher, 2017). Critical realism supports the idea that reality exists independently of

an individual's knowledge and perception (Bogna et al., 2020; Zachariadis et al., 2013).

Critical realists believe that reality is complex and stratified into three layers: the real, the actual, and the empirical (Easton, 2010; Fletcher, 2017; Lawani, 2020; Parra et al., 2021; Roberts, 2014; Zachariadis et al., 2013). The empirical is the realm of observable events that can be measured or explained empirically. Individuals understand these events based on their human experiences and interpretations. The actual realm consists of events that exist independently of human experience and are generated from the causal powers of entities, regardless of whether we observe them or not. The real realm includes physical and social objects, structures, and internally related entities. These interrelated entities constitute causal mechanisms that produce events appearing at the empirical level. Therefore, critical realism assumes that even though there is only one reality with its objects, structures, and powers, as researchers, we have limited access to it and can only observe and understand some of its aspects.

Epistemologically, critical realism employs interpretivist epistemology, acknowledging that knowledge is socially produced and requires interpretive understanding (Bogna et al., 2020; Zachariadis et al., 2013). Yet, despite that critical realism recognizes the role of subjective interpretations in a given context, contrary to interpretivism, it does not deny the existence of underlying causal mechanisms that facilitate various processes (Lawani, 2021; Zachariadis et al., 2013). By observing and interpreting meaning, critical realists intend to explain the elements of reality that exist prior to the events and experiences that occurred (Wynn & Williams, 2012). Therefore, although critical realists create a description of the real world by analyzing participants' experiences, they seek linkages between experiences, elements, and causal mechanisms (Bogna et al., 2020; Lawani, 2021).

Critical realism does not solely focus on the use of empirical research but instead shifts the attention to exploring and establishing whether hypothesized causal mechanisms are involved in the observed event (Bogna et al., 2020; Zachariadis et al., 2013). As such, critical realism employs various research methods, including both qualitative and quantitative. However, the role of qualitative methods is more profound within critical realism because they allow for an in-depth description of a phenomenon, hypothesizing, and identifying causal mechanisms and the relationships between them (Zachariadis et al., 2013; Parra et al., 2021). Additionally, existing theory can serve as a starting point for empirical research, but the researcher must be ready to accept its fallibility or conditional nature (Fletcher, 2017; Roberts, 2014). Therefore, initial theory can facilitate a deeper analysis and guide in creating a more accurate explanation of observed events (Fletcher, 2017).

While approaching this research through the lens of critical realism, I view emotional intelligence as a part of a deeper layer of reality, the real, that may not always be easily observable by the researchers. Therefore, selecting participants by administering a quantitative assessment of emotional intelligence allowed me to capture an empirical reality. However, since such observations are incomplete according to critical realism, further examination of the in-depth contextual information about emotionally challenging decision-making situations allowed me to explore deeper processes guiding deans' decision-making under particular conditions. Moreover, engaging with both the existing (fallible) theory of ability emotional intelligence and participants' experiences in this research allowed me to challenge the existing understanding of emotional intelligence and attempt to explain reality in a given context.

Research Design

Flowing from my ontological and epistemological assumptions, the purpose of the

research, and the nature of the research questions, I chose a qualitative multiple-case study design. There were three reasons for undertaking qualitative research. First, few researchers have addressed the link between emotional intelligence and decision-making in a community college setting. Since one of the purposes of qualitative research is to investigate a topic from a new angle (Hays & Singh, 2012), a qualitative study provides insight into how community college academic deans use emotional intelligence in difficult decision-making situations. Second, qualitative research involves studying the complexity of a phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Thus, employing qualitative research to present a holistic description of such a complex phenomenon as emotional intelligence was appropriate. It allowed capturing its many dimensions, including manifestation in decision-making. Finally, in a qualitative study, a researcher focuses on phenomena occurring in natural settings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Therefore, only a qualitative method allowed for the exploration of emotional intelligence while addressing contextual factors contributing to the challenges in decision-making in a community college setting.

Research Tradition

The research tradition selected for this study is a multiple-case study. The case study design allows an exploration of a complex phenomenon through one or more cases within a particular context (Creswell, 2007). Case study research is consistent with the critical realist paradigm, as it allows engaging with the existing theory, seeking explanations, and uncovering the structure of underlying reality (Easton, 2010).

A case study is suitable when a researcher seeks to explore a case or compare several cases (Creswell, 2007). Each case represents a unique bounded system, including but not limited to an individual, program, process, group, community, or event (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019;

Merriam, 1998). I selected a multiple-case study methodology because it allows the researcher to explore various cases and commonalities and differences between them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019; Yin, 2009). In the present multiple-case study, a case is a community college academic dean. Stake (1995) noted that case understanding requires experiencing the activity of the case occurring in its contexts and particular situations. Therefore, in this study, I intended to explore deans' emotional intelligence as it occurred in the context of decision-making in a community college setting. Each case is bounded by the type of setting (community college), context (difficult decision), and position (academic deans). Since I was interested in exploring how academic deans used emotional intelligence in difficult decision-making situations, a multiple-case study design allowed me to explore the experiences of individual cases in-depth and conduct a cross-case analysis to explore potentially contrasting approaches to decision-making across cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Theoretical Perspective

I sought to understand the role of emotional intelligence in decision-making through the modified version of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso (2016) four-branch model of emotional intelligence (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). According to the model, emotional intelligence is a mental ability that can be measured with performance assessment with a criterion for correctness. Fitting within the boundaries of conceptual definitions of intelligence, ability emotional intelligence is conceptualized in the model as a set of four components: (a) emotion recognition, (b) emotion understanding, (c) emotion regulation in oneself, and (d) emotion management. Each component is distinct but related to other components (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

According to the Schlegel and Mortillaro (2019) model, emotion recognition ability is the ability to accurately recognize the emotions of others based on nonverbal cues, including facial

expressions, tone of voice, and gestures. Emotion understanding is the ability to infer individuals' emotional states from information about the qualities and causes of one's own and other's emotions in a particular context or situation. Emotion regulation is the ability to employ cognitive regulation strategies in various situations to control one's emotions. Emotion management is the ability to choose appropriate behavioral strategies to regulate the emotions of others (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

Research Setting and Context

The study took place at ten community college campuses in two southeastern states in the United States. For the purposes of this study, community colleges are defined as regionally accredited institutions, which primarily award the associate degree as their highest award (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Therefore, community colleges that offer a limited number of baccalaureate degrees were not excluded from this research. The recruitment of the participants started at community colleges of one southeastern state and was expanded to the second state until the desired number of participants was reached.

Participant Sampling

I employed a purposeful, intensity sampling technique to select a sample of community college academic deans with a high level of emotional intelligence. Intensity sampling allows the selection of information-rich cases that intensely manifest a phenomenon of inquiry (Hays & Singh, 2012; Patton, 2002). Therefore, to determine academic deans' emotional intelligence level and select those with a high level, I asked the prospective participants to first complete the Geneva Emotional Competence Test v1.0 (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

Using the colleges' websites, I began by identifying 97 academic deans in one state and then invited these deans to participate in the study by email in groups of 10. The invitation email

included a description of the purpose and nature of the study and projected time commitment

from the participants. I informed the deans that the study included two phases. The first phase

required the deans to take the emotional intelligence assessment. The second phase required

deans' participation in two interviews. I explained that some but not all who completed the test

would be invited to the second phase of the study and asked the deans to respond to my email to

signify their intent to participate. Once I received the reply, I followed up with an informed

consent form and link and instructions to the emotional intelligence test.

Twenty-one deans from the first state agreed to participate in the study; however, only

15 took the emotional intelligence assessment. Out of the 15 deans who took the assessment,

seven had an overall emotional intelligence score required for participation in the second phase

of the study. I then expanded my search for participants in the second state and sent out another

31 invitations in groups of 10. As a result, ten participants agreed to participate in the study,

seven took the assessment, and five had the required score for participation in the second phase.

Overall, I sent 128 invitations, 22 academic deans took the emotional intelligence assessment,

and 12 of them were invited to participate in the interview phase of my research. The individuals

not selected for the second phase, were provided with the survey results, an opportunity for a

debriefing session, and additional resources on emotional intelligence.

The deans who were invited to participate in the second, interview phase of the study

had an overall emotional intelligence score of 0.68 or above out of the highest possible score of

1.0 (Université de Genève, 2021). In my reasoning for choosing a score of 0.68 as a threshold, I

relied on the data presented in the studies by Simonet et al. (2021) and by Schlegel and

Mortillaro (2019). The overall mean score among 821 participants in the study by Simonet et al.

(2021) was 0.55. The mean score among psychology students (N=113) in the study by Schlegel

and Mortillaro (2019) was 0.81, and the authors viewed it as very high. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the overall emotional intelligence score of 0.68 or above was considered high.

It is important to mention that I invited the dean to participate in the study gradually, which allowed me to collect data and conduct data analysis simultaneously. Such an approach allowed me to continue adding more participants until I reached a point of saturation or redundancy (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the sampling size was completed once I no longer found new information that added to my understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Attention was given to ensure participants were fully aware of the study requirements and their role in the research. I notified them of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. I also asked for their permission to audio-record the interviews.

I took appropriate measures to protect participants' privacy. First, I obtained the informed consent electronically. My Informed Consent form is available in Appendix C. Additionally, to safeguard the collected data from unauthorized access, I removed all direct identifiers as soon as they were collected and created pseudonyms for all participants and the colleges they represent. I stored the identifying information in a separate secure location on a password-protected hard drive.

Data Collection Procedures

Collecting data from multiple data sources is the hallmark of case study research (Yin, 2018). Data sources can include interviews, direct and participant observations, documents, archival records, and artifacts (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018). Using multiple sources for data collection allows the development of converging lines of inquiry or, in other words, triangulate and corroborate multiple sources of evidence for more convincing and accurate findings (Yin,

2018). For this research, I collected the data through two interviews with each participant and field notes. Data collection took place from October 2022 to April 2023.

Interviews

Interviews were a primary data collection method in this study, allowing me to gain an in-depth understanding of emotional intelligence in decision-making in a community college setting. I conducted two in-depth semi-structured interviews with each participant using an interview protocol, resulting in a total of 24 interviews. Using semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions provided an opportunity to focus on the phenomenon under study while also allowing research on unanticipated topics through follow-up questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Interviews were conducted through video chat, each lasting 45 to 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded and auto-transcribed. The audio files and auto-generated transcripts were used to create accurate transcripts of the interviews.

During the first interview, I established rapport with the participants by asking them to share their professional journey of becoming an academic dean and their motivation for participating in my study. I also invited them to share what decisions they found to be difficult and why, and the factors in general they considered when making such decisions. During the first interview, I also asked about the role of emotions in their decision-making.

At the end of the first interview, the participants were encouraged to think about a particularly challenging decision-making situation that they have experienced in a professional role. This challenging situation was explored in detail during the second interview. Additionally, during the second interview, I presented the deans with the result of their emotional intelligence assessment which included their overall emotional intelligence score and scores on individual emotional intelligence skills with the description of each skill. After the assessment results were

presented, I followed up with additional questions that encouraged reflection.

Field Notes

Through field notes, I created an accurate and thorough record of all activities related to

the study. Following the Bogdan and Biklen (2003) classification of field notes, I took two types

of notes: descriptive field notes and reflective field notes. Descriptive field notes included my

observations of the settings and the circumstances of the interviews, as well as my observations

of the deans' reactions and interactions with me during the interviews. These notes did not

contain any reflections or explanations but rather described what I observed directly as

straightforwardly as possible. Taking these notes allowed me to create a comprehensive record of

the research setting and provided an opportunity to record details about the participants not

reflected in the interview data.

In reflective notes, I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and impressions before and

immediately after each interview. I also recorded my reflections on how this information added

to my knowledge of the phenomenon. These personal reflections also revealed my ideas,

concerns, and analytical insights. Collecting these records engaged me in an ongoing process of

reflection and served as another source of evidence for this study (Hays & Sign, 2012).

Instrumentation

I used two instruments in this study. The Geneva Emotional Competence Test (GECo)

assisted in selecting study participants. The permission to use the test was obtained from Geneva

University (see Appendix H for the approval confirmation). The test was distributed and

managed using the Qualtrics survey tool. Participant information was entered within the

Qualtrics system to allow for the generation of personal links that were later distributed to the

academic deans. The interview protocol (Appendix G) helped to address central research

questions.

The GECo

The GECo is an ability measure of emotional intelligence developed by Schlegel and Mortillaro (2019). It includes 110 items and measures four components of emotional intelligence: emotion recognition, emotion understanding, emotion regulation in oneself, and emotion management in others. The GECo employs theory-based item development and is based on the situations occurring in the workplace (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

In the emotion recognition subtest, test-takers view 42 short videos in which actors express emotions through the use of facial, acoustic, body cues, and fictional language. For each item, a test taker must choose one of the 14 emotions portrayed by the actor. The correct answer represents the emotion that the actor has been instructed to express (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

The emotion understanding subtest prompts a test taker to read and appraise 20 scenarios describing various emotional situations to measure how well an individual can infer emotional states from the causes and features of one's and other's emotions. This subtest is based on emotional appraisal theory and includes three to four items for each of the 15 emotions. Test-takers must consider the situational cues and select the emotion that best describes the feeling experienced by the person in the scenario (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

The emotion regulation subtest measures how an individual can use adaptive cognitive strategies to modify thinking and mitigate one's negative emotions (sadness/despair, fear/anxiety, anger/irritation). After reading scenarios describing situations that elicit negative emotions (28 items), test-takers are asked to choose two response options reflecting the thinking that they would most likely exhibit in that situation. Response options include four emotion

regulation strategies: two maladaptive (such as blaming oneself, blaming others, rumination, or catastrophizing) and two adaptive (acceptance, putting into perspective, positive refocusing, refocusing on planning, and positive reappraisal). Test-takers receive one point for each adaptive strategy they choose (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

Finally, the emotion management subtest includes 20 items measuring individuals' ability to choose the most appropriate behavioral strategy to manage the emotions of others in a particular situation. For each situation, characterized by unique patterns of social and personal factors, test-takers are presented with five response options, each reflecting a conflict-handling strategy: competing, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation. The correct choice includes choosing the strategy that reflects the most effective course of action as determined by group and emotion experts' ratings (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

I chose this ability emotional intelligence assessment because of its workplace specificity. The test is adapted to a workplace context and includes emotion-related scenarios that are likely to occur in a work setting between various stakeholders: coworkers, subordinates, supervisors, and clients (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Since the test is contextualized for the workplace rather than private life, it is particularly appropriate for research on organizational behavior, professional performance, and leadership (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

Interview Protocol

I have developed the interview protocol with open-ended questions to conduct the semi-structured interviews with the participants. The protocol was used as a guide for the interviews and included questions concerning participants' experiences and perspectives (Hays & Singh, 2012). Besides containing a set of questions, the interview protocol also directed me in the interview process by including procedural data such as scripts for the interview initiation and

conclusion, prompts for consent collection, and other prompts needed to collect the desired information (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The methodologist for this study reviewed the protocol to strengthen the efficacy of the interview questions. My interview protocol is available in Appendix G.

Data Analysis

Yin (2018) highlighted the importance of choosing a general analytic strategy for the data analysis in case study research. The analytic strategy serves as a guide linking the data to significant concepts and providing a sense of direction for data analysis (Yin, 2018). In analyzing the data in my study, I combined two general analytic strategies proposed by Yin (2018). The first strategy included working my data from the "ground up." This inductive strategy allowed me to initiate the systematic discovery of new concepts from the analyzed data (Yin, 2018).

At the same time, I also relied on theoretical propositions that have led to this research. These propositions served as a theoretical orientation helping me to focus on the topic of my study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018):

- Emotional intelligence is a mental ability, and it can be measured (Mayer et al., 1990; Mayer et al., 2001; Mayer et al., 2016).

- Emotional intelligence is limited to "the set of abilities involved in reasoning about emotions and using emotions to enhance reasoning." (Mayer & Caruso, 2008, p. 514)

- Emotional intelligence includes four skills: (a) emotion recognition ability, (b) emotion understanding, (c) emotion regulation, and (d) emotion management (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

- Emotion recognition is "the ability to accurately recognize emotions from other

people's nonverbal expressions conveyed by face, voice, and body" (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019, p. 562).

- Emotion understanding is "the ability to accurately appraise the features of a situation, including their quality and timing, to infer another (unknown) person's emotional state" (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019, p. 562).

- Emotion regulation is the ability to use various cognitive strategies to regulate one's emotions (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

- Emotion management is the ability to select appropriate behavioral strategies to regulate the emotions of others (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

While following the general analytical strategies described above, I analyzed the data in two phases, as Merriam (2009) suggested. During the first phase, I conducted a within-case analysis for each of the cases. In the second phase, using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I employed a cross-case synthesis to examine cross-case patterns.

Within-Case Analysis

Data analysis in this study occurred simultaneously with data collection. After collecting the data from the very first participant meeting, I immediately proceeded to data analysis. I first read my field notes as they included detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and conversation, as well as provided early interpretations of my observations. I then proceeded to read and re-read the interview transcript to ensure I was familiar with the data before initiating the coding process. During this process, I also looked for responses and phrases that needed clarification. As a method of member-checking, I followed up on unclear parts of the transcript in the second interview. In some cases, I asked the participants to review the transcript and insert comments to clarify my questions.

I then analyzed the interview data and field notes by applying initial coding as a first-cycle coding technique. This coding technique includes "breaking down the qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences" (Straus & Corbin, 1998, p.102). Applying initial coding allowed me to facilitate deep reflection on the data contents during the initial stage of the data analysis. The theoretical propositions described above also served as initial codes.

As I assigned initial codes to the data and looked for patterns in my field notes and interview transcripts, I also engaged in analytic memo writing. Memo writing helps a researcher think critically about personal assumptions, context, and relationship with the phenomenon affecting choices in the coding process (Saldaña, 2009). Thus, in my memos, I reflected on my coding process and choices, as well as captured my reflections, ideas, and things to pursue in the following interviews. Additionally, at that stage, I developed an initial version of the code book that included all codes and their descriptions.

Once the initial codes were assigned, I started organizing and categorizing them into tentative themes. As I continued with data collection, I continuously compared each new set of data with the previous sets. As my analysis progressed from one case to another one, I reworded some codes. I also reorganized and refined the categories with each new set of data until I reached saturation.

Cross-Case Analysis

After coding and analyzing data for all cases, I had twelve reports, one for each case outlining all codes and categories related to that case as well as a description of relationships between various categories. I then employed a cross-case analysis. At this stage of analysis, I

sought to build abstractions across all cases. Following Yin's (2018) recommendations, I created word tables outlining data from multiple cases and then examined them for cross-case patterns. Examination of cross-case patterns continued until I could build a general explanation fitting each of the individual cases; thus, allowing me to draw cross-case conclusions.

Trustworthiness

The quality of research can be judged according to the four most common tests: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Yin (2018) pointed out the importance of addressing these four criteria throughout various phases of the research, including research design, data collection, and data analysis. Therefore, to ensure the study results are accurate and trustworthy, I will use several tactics throughout this study to address each of the four criteria.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is analogous to internal validity in quantitative studies (Hays & Singh, 2012). The study is credible or "believable" when researchers measure what they intended (Hays & Singh, 2012; Shenton, 2004). By including evidence from interviews with multiple participants and field notes, I supported triangulation of data sources; thus, allowing exploration of different aspects of the phenomenon (Shenton, 2004; Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Second, I employed rephrased questions to deeper explore the data raised by participants and identify potential contradictions (Shenton, 2004). Furthermore, member-checking allowed me to accurately portray their experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012; Shenton, 2004). Asking these participants to review interview transcripts and provide follow-up comments provided clarifications when needed. Finally, I held regular debriefing sessions with my dissertation chair to discover alternative interpretations and identify potential biases and assumptions of my

approach (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

Researchers compare transferability to generalizability in quantitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012). It is important to point out that generalizability, or the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalizable to a larger population is not the goal neither of qualitative research in general (Hays & Singh, 2012) nor of this study in particular. However, by providing thick descriptions of participants' experiences, perspectives, views, beliefs, and the research context, I ensured sufficient contextual information for scholars to determine if they could apply my conclusions to other situations.

Dependability

Dependability is similar to the concept of reliability in quantitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012). A study is dependable when other researchers following the same procedures and conducting the same research over again arrive at the same conclusions (Yin, 2009). To address dependability and ensure future researchers can repeat the research, I provided an in-depth description of the research design and its implementation, the operational details of data gathering, and a reflective appraisal of the project (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

The concept of confirmability in qualitative research is comparable to the concept of objectivity in quantitative studies. Triangulating data from multiple cases and using field notes and memos during all data collection and data analysis steps maximized the confirmability of my research (Shenton, 2004). I also ensured the audit trail process provided evidence of systematic data collection and analysis procedures (Hays & Singh, 2012). The audit trail traced the research process step-by-step, outlining my decision-making process and the described procedures (Hays

& Singh, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

The study is descriptive and designed to explore emotional intelligence in the decision-making of academic deans employed in community colleges. It does not aim to confirm a theory or generalize the results to a larger population of community college students. As in all other studies, there are limitations to this study.

One of the limitations is the participants' response bias. Decision-making in complex situations could be a sensitive topic. It is possible that academic deans chose to share situations that presented them in a more favorable light or avoided sharing certain aspects of complicated situations that were inconsistent with their preferred self-image. Additionally, the true motives of academic deans for making certain decisions remain unknown; thus, leaving unexplored the dark side of their emotional intelligence skills, such as emotional manipulation and deception.

Another limitation of the study is the use of only two data collection methods. Although considering the nature of the topic, the use of selected data collection methods is justified, the study could benefit from additional methods such as participants' reflective journals. However, access to relative data using these methods could be constrained by the deans' busy schedules resulting in a lack of time for such activities.

An additional limitation stemming from the nature of the study and the research questions was the use of limited data sources. Collecting the information from individuals affected by deans' decision-making could provide a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. However, due to the risks to deans' reputation and relationships between various stakeholders collecting such data does not appear to be feasible.

Finally, researcher bias is another limitation. Although I address my theoretical

orientation, experiences, and assumptions, as an individual interested in emotional intelligence, I bring a specific worldview that shapes the meanings and conclusions I draw from participants' experiences. Thus, despite the reflexivity throughout the data collection and data analysis, the unique nature of qualitative research prohibits me from entirely eliminating my biases and preconceived beliefs (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

Researcher Positionality

Since the researcher plays a central role in the research process, in this section I address the trustworthiness of the study by sharing my positionality and prior experiences as related to the topic of this research. I am a 37-year-old white heterosexual, cis-gendered female, a mother, stepmother, and a wife. I grew up in a lower-middle-class family in the Southern part of Russia where ethnically Russians (including myself) were part of a religious and ethnic minority group. The culture and values of the region largely shaped my identity. Among them are dutiful absolute respect to elders, submission to authority, acceptance of traditional gender roles, hospitality, and mutual support between members of the group.

After immigrating to the United States at the age of 21, I began questioning some of the values instilled in my upbringing. The most noticeable transformation began when I became a parent. As a member of American society, I could no longer expect my children to unquestionably obey and submit to my wishes and rules; I had to learn to value their desires and accept the behavior that would be considered disrespectful in my parents' house. However, accepting others is a challenge when a person is accustomed to suppressing one's own feelings and emotions.

Meanwhile, in my professional life, as a community college educator and an entry-level academic affairs administrator, I faced multiple situations in which I had to make decisions

impacting various people in my unit and beyond. Due to the small size of the town where the college was located and the small campus where I worked, making decisions often involved considering the relationships with various people. As a part of a small community, I frequently taught children and family members of colleagues in my classes, had my family members taking my colleague's classes, had close friends of my neighbors applying for work in my unit, and regularly met my students, colleagues, and supervisors in grocery stores and other public places. Thus, making a wrong decision could result in ruined relationships.

In some instances, in my administrative role, I have experienced intense emotions, such as fear or anger, and had difficulty managing them. On several occasions, I found myself in situations of conflict of interest, with the need to choose between what is better for me personally and what is better for the college. Such situations elicited strong emotional reactions that probably affected the decisions I made. I often wondered if my experiences were common and if my colleagues had the same struggles, particularly since I was born and raised in a different country.

As an emerging mid-level administrator, I often observed my colleagues and superiors approach challenging situations. I have witnessed some people experiencing strong emotions and making hasty and seemingly irrational decisions. I have observed how anxiety in one's personal life affected choices in work situations and how fear provoked defensiveness. At the same time, I have admired the ability of some to recognize their emotions and the emotions of others, de-escalate the situation, and make what seemed to be a conscious decision. Motivated to learn to better recognize and manage my own emotions and the emotions of others, I came across the concept of emotional intelligence and was fascinated by the idea that one's emotions, even those that I viewed as "negative," such as anger or frustration, could be used in adaptive ways. I started

wondering if I could learn from emotionally intelligent people and became encouraged to seek a deeper understanding of the ways they approached decision-making under challenging situations. I hoped to learn from them and share this knowledge with others looking for ways to improve the emotional aspect of their decision-making.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case research was to explore the ways in which community college academic deans drew on emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions. Framed by a critical realist worldview, this study employed a qualitative multiple-case study to explore how highly emotionally intelligent academic deans make complex decisions in a community college setting. The population included community college academic deans employed by community colleges in the United States. Two semi-structured interviews with each participant and field notes provided the data for the study. The data analysis included two phases: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. I employed triangulation of data sources, iterative questioning, member-checking, debriefing sessions, reflective journal, audit trail, and thick descriptions of the deans' emotional intelligence in the decision-making process to bolster the trustworthiness of the research.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case research was to explore the ways highly emotionally intelligent community college academic deans draw on emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions. In the following chapter, I report the findings of 12 cases, each represented by a community college academic dean. The research questions addressed in the findings are as follows:

1. What difficult decisions do community college academic deans face in their professional roles?

2. How do highly emotionally intelligent academic deans employ emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions?

I present my findings in three main sections. In the first section, I present the demographics of the participants. In the second section, I discuss deans' challenges of working in the middle level of the institution and its implications on their decision-making. I also report the findings related to the types of difficult decisions community college academic deans face in their professional roles. In this subsection, I describe four main characteristics of difficult decisions that emerged from the cross-case analysis of data: (a) negative impact on an individual, (b) challenged personal integrity, (c) risk of damaged relationships and broken trust and respect, and (d) perceptions of others and lost reputation. Each case will be described within a bigger category. I conclude this section with a report on additional themes that evolved during the research process.

In the third section of this chapter, I describe the findings related to the deans' emotional intelligence in decision-making. I present five emotional intelligence skills academic deans

employ when making difficult decisions: (a) emotion recognition of others, (b) emotion recognition of self, (c) emotion regulation, (d) emotion understanding, and (e) emotion management. In each section, I report on the ways academic deans manifest each emotional intelligence skill in their decision-making.

Participant Summaries

The invitation for participation in the study was sent to 128 community college academic deans. Thirty-one deans agreed to participate in the study; however, only 22 took the emotional intelligence assessment. Out of 22 deans who took the emotional intelligence assessment, 12 academic deans, representing ten community colleges were interviewed in this study.

Each of the 12 participants is a current community college academic dean, assistant dean, or associate dean whose overall emotional intelligence score on the Geneva Emotional Competence Test (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019) was equal to or above 0.68. The total emotional intelligence (EI) scores ranged from 0.677 to 0.767 (see Table 1). Seven of the participants are academic deans, three are associate deans, one is an interim dean, and one is an academic dean with additional administrative responsibilities.

The participants represented two southeastern states. Seven academic deans represented State 1, and five represented State 2. There were two males and ten females. Three participants were Black, and nine were White. The years in the current position ranged from one to two to 15 years. Academic areas of responsibility represented in the study included academics, arts, sciences, languages, social sciences, health sciences, business, industry, mathematics, transfer, and technology. Deans' complete titles are not included in this summary to protect participants' identities.

Table 1

Participant Summaries

Name	Gender	Race	Years in position	EI Score
Victoria	F	White	5-10	0.725
Aida	F	Black	0-5	0.705
Nicole	F	White	5-10	0.763
Courtney	F	White	0-5	0.732
Becky	F	White	10-15	0.677
James	M	Black	0-5	0.717
Kathryn	F	White	0-5	0.717
Lauren	F	White	0-5	0.685
Michael	M	Black	0-5	0.701
Jackie	F	White	0-5	0.767
Patricia	F	White	0-5	0.696
Stephanie	F	White	0-5	0.686

All the participants mentioned their desire to help and "give back" as the main motivation for participating in the study. Ten of the participants either had earned a doctoral degree or worked on completing one during the data collection process, so they felt empathy for a fellow researcher and wanted to be helpful. Ten of the participants shared that they were interested in the topic, and five mentioned they were intrigued by learning more about themselves through the process.

Difficult Decisions

The analysis of the data collected from the participants showed that difficult decisions for academic deans are those that (a) may have a negative impact on individuals involved in a decision-making situation, (b) challenge deans' personal integrity, (c) may damage relationships and trust with colleagues, (d) may be misinterpreted by colleagues posing risk to the deans' reputation. Most of these decisions are a consequence of the deans' position in the middle of the college's organizational structure and the obligation to satisfy the opposing needs of multiple stakeholders. The description below reflects the conflicting interests of administration and faculty, faculty and students, and faculty against faculty.

I will start this section by describing deans' challenge of being in the middle of the organization and its implications for decision-making. I will continue with the report on four types of difficult decisions. In the final section, I present additional findings not directly related to the first research question, but important for a holistic understanding of deans' decision-making process. Specifically, I discuss deans' perceptions of a "good" leader, their struggles with self-doubt and lack of confidence, and their learning and growth as a result of the challenges they had to overcome.

The Challenge of Being in the Middle and Difficult Decisions

Most of the difficult decisions academic deans face in their professional roles stem from the nature of their mid-level positions. The challenge of being in the middle is reflected in the obligation to address the needs of multiple parties that often represent conflicting views and priorities. For that reason, all difficult decisions are decisions without an obvious right choice. "There's not a good choice, you've got conflicting people with conflicting, you know, beliefs or perspectives," said Becky when describing what it was like to be in the middle. "You've got to

try to find the best solution for all when there's not really any particular solution that you really see is straightforward in the way to go," she added.

One of the main difficulties of such decisions is the deans' inability to satisfy the needs of all. Kathryn shared that a difficult decision is "where one person's gonna have to end up being right, and one person's gonna have to end up being wrong, be that faculty to faculty, faculty to myself, student to faculty." She mentioned that in some situations she cannot reach a decision that everybody feels good about. "It is difficult when I know one person is going to feel like they ended up wrong."

Even routine decisions can become complicated when multiple parties are involved. Jackie talked about the difficulty of creating a course schedule which, in her words, "wouldn't be that big of a deal." Yet, making a schedule becomes a very challenging task when trying to balance all the different entities and their needs. To this, Jackie added: "Some folks get upset."

It is common among academic deans to feel emotional distress in their attempts to find a solution that would be fair for all parties involved. Since it is often impossible, deans feel guilt and sometimes have to suffer the repercussions for their decisions whether it is lost trust and respect, ruined relationships, damaged reputation, or restricted career opportunities within and outside of the institution. Patricia talked about the need to "weigh out a lot of the political stuff" and often "taking the hits" from various stakeholders when things do not go as expected by the parties:

> I gotta take the hit on the back from both sides. From my boss who's coming down on me, even though in my mind I still didn't do anything wrong. And I've also got to take the hit from the students in the program director … And so, I'm stuck in this middle of, you know, taking it left and right.

Like Patricia, other deans talked about the impact of college politics on their decision-making. In describing difficult decisions, Courtney talked about "political things" at her college and the risk of sharing information with the wrong group of people. "Some of the decisions that I have to make about things involve whether or not people are allied with a particular group of people in the organization or not, and it changes a lot." She mentioned that sharing information with the wrong group could be dangerous. For that reason, she was mindful of what she was sharing and how she worked on the committees with people who did not align with her.

Several deans mentioned they had to make their most difficult decisions when stepping into the dean's role or early on in their tenure as a dean. For some of them transitioning into the dean's role meant feeling "stuck in the middle" between faculty and administration. These deans talked about unexpectedly changed relationships with their former colleagues.

When Stephanie accepted an associate dean position, she did not anticipate the transition to this role to be difficult. She was very close with her colleagues in her former role, but once the transition happened, the relationship dynamics with Stephanie's colleagues changed. Stephanie shared:

> I didn't anticipate being stuck in the middle. So, I feel like now professionally I've become sort of, not necessarily say, I'm a loner, but sort of am. I mean like I have my other, my other associate dean colleagues, but I didn't know them as well as I did faculty, and so I feel like that professional relationship that I have with them is, the dynamics are different now. The dynamics are less personal and more work-related.

Jackie remembered her transition to the dean's role as the most challenging time of her career. She replaced a person who was going through a grievance process. That person was her friend, and he was still employed by the college when she stepped into her new role. That

changed relationship was the most challenging part of her new job.

Nicole had a similar experience. Although she felt she was the same person when she stepped into her new role, her colleagues felt differently. Nicole stated:

It was really hard because they were my friends, you know. And then, when I moved into this role, it was like: "I'm still the same person, you know. I'm still the same person that you worked with for 10 years." And, you know, we had dinner together and things like that. And just it's crazy how, when we transition into the administrative role, how people will just completely treat you differently.

Kathryn also talked about the challenge of supervising former colleagues and its impact on her decision-making: "I'm the dean in the division that I worked in for many years, and that comes with all kinds of complications." She felt she had to be "extremely cautious" when making decisions because she was working with her peer group now in a supervisory role.

Overall, the most challenging decision-making situations are due to the deans' position in the middle of the institutional structure. The nature of this position often requires deans to address the conflicting needs of multiple stakeholders and find a solution that would satisfy all involved. However, since the right decision often does not exist, deans not only experience emotional turmoil but, in some instances, have to suffer the negative consequences of their decisions.

Campus politics also impact how deans share information and make decisions. Making decisions can be particularly challenging for new deans who undergo a change in the relationship dynamics with their former colleagues. Therefore, the transition into the dean's role is viewed by several deans as the most challenging time in their careers.

Types of Difficult Decisions

There are four categories of difficult decisions academic deans make in their professional roles. Difficult decisions are those that (a) may have a negative impact on individuals involved in a decision-making situation, (b) challenge deans' personal integrity, (c) may damage relationships and trust with colleagues, and (d) trigger inaccurate perceptions of others. Below, each section describing a particular type of difficult decision incorporates the cases that most vividly represent that category. Due to the complexity of the decisions that academic deans had to make, the same cases are presented in multiple categories.

Negative Impact on an Individual

Among the most difficult decisions that academic deans had to make in their professional roles were those that could negatively impact the livelihood, careers, and families of the individuals involved in decision-making. Such decisions predominantly involve personnel issues, including conflicts between employees, employee evaluations, and dismissals. The participants involved in making decisions with a potentially negative impact on others often experienced an internal conflict between professional responsibility to the institution, division, department, or student success in general and responsibility to the individual whose life and career depended on the dean's decision.

"What I Aside Here Can Have Significant Impacts on the Quality of Her Life." When describing difficult decisions Victoria pointed out that those with a potentially damaging impact on an individual are some of the most difficult: "I think none of the decisions that we make in higher ed are really without impacts on people." For that reason, it was important for Victoria to consider the severity of the impact: "Is that a damaging impact, or is that an impact that's uncomfortable?" If she perceived the impact as "unrecoverable," Victoria looked for

options that would allow an individual "to move forward."

As an academic dean responsible for evaluating an administrative faculty, Victoria talked about the challenging experience of formally evaluating a faculty member and choosing between "meet expectations" and "does not meet expectations" as an overall evaluation. The faculty shortcomings were brought to Victoria's attention through several complaints from other colleagues. Victoria worked on resolving the complaints and addressing the faculty's shortcomings throughout the year in an informal way, but when the time to issue a formal evaluation came Victoria struggled. After working with the faculty member Victoria felt she was responsible for the success of the faculty member. Victoria shared:

> I felt invested in this person. I had known the person. I have been a prior faculty member
>
> in the program ... I hired her, and I wanted to see her be successful. I wanted her to do
>
> well in the role, but I also knew I had a responsibility as a supervisor and to the
>
> institution, and to the individuals who were now sharing complaints with me.

Victoria's decision-making was complicated by the fact that the faculty member "met and exceeded expectations of many areas of the responsibilities," was "excelling in many ways," and was "demonstrating effort" in making improvements in weaker areas. Victoria thought that asking a faculty member to improve and grow in those weak areas was similar to "asking someone to change their personality." Victoria understood it was a difficult improvement to make, yet she was responsible for documenting the faculty's struggles that could lead to a formal improvement plan and other serious outcomes stemming from it:

> What seemed to be a simple decision would have major implications as part of her
>
> personnel record ... It would lead to a formal improvement plan ... There's potential that
>
> if something else happens, that she'll have a non-renewal of our contract. Which in that,

for someone, who's been in the state system for decades, has an impact on retirement. I mean there just seems [sic] to be so many pieces, like what I aside here can have significant impacts on the quality of her life and her professional life.

A conflict that Victoria experienced caused her to feel guilt no matter which option she chose. On the one hand, had she chosen "does not meet expectations," she felt guilty for having a negative impact on the faculty's life. On the other hand, had she opted for the "meets expectations," she felt guilty for not meeting the obligations of a college leader. When talking about the emotional turmoil she experienced, Victoria confessed:

It sounds in some ways like you just had to choose a box to check, but the implications of that box seem so big, and not only for me, but also for this individual ... How can I be responsible for addressing this as I should in my role, but in a way that isn't devastating for an individual, but still the right thing to do for the institution? Because I think there's that tension. Like, I'm a representative of the college, and I have to keep what's best for the institution and for students in mind, not individual people necessarily all the time.

Although the decision Victoria settled on is less important for this study than the challenge she went through while making the decision, Victoria decided to assign "meet expectations" as the overall evaluation while also documenting the shortcomings in the narrative box. Victoria mentioned that in her decision she was guided by her "intuition or instinct" and her beliefs that choosing another option would be inhumane. If she were to relive this situation, she would have made the same decision again because it was consistent with her integrity and personal values.

"I Am a Horrible Person." James found himself in a similar situation. His challenging decision was having to let a person go from employment because of several issues including

absenteeism. When brainstorming about his decision James considered the impact of the

employee's behavior on the team's morale and productivity. From the administrative standpoint,

James knew that accepting the employee's behavior was not fair to other team members who still

managed to come to work when they had personal issues. Conversely, letting that person go

would mean negatively impacting them:

> The emotional impact on somebody else's life, that I feel like I could negatively impact
>
> somebody else. Like I'm doing this thing that may feel bad. You know, the most recent
>
> time, the reason why they couldn't make it, they listed all these days because of
>
> childcare. It's like - Oh, well, you know, I am a horrible person.

Like Victoria, James felt responsible for the poor-performing individual who was not going to

leave on their own. However, he also felt responsible for performing his administrative duties.

"There's being responsible for myself and the college and things like that," James noted. The

opposing thoughts caused unpleasant emotional turmoil.

In the end, after trying different approaches to influence the employee's behavior and

seeing no result, James had no other choice but to dismiss the employee. He could no longer

justify keeping an employee who was not willing to make necessary changes to improve their

performance and who continued to negatively impact the performance of the whole team. For

James, letting them go was the right thing to do.

**"I Got in This Role Because I Wanted to Help Faculty … Not to Make Them Lose

Their Positions."** Stephanie also struggled with the decision to formally reprimand a faculty

member for poor performance. Over a few months, Stephanie tried to address the faculty's issue

of not turning in important paperwork on time. She had numerous conversations with the faculty

member, set deadlines, and had routine meetings to keep the faculty member accountable, yet the

work was still not completed in a timely fashion. Stephanie felt responsible to the college for

fixing the situation:

> I knew I needed to because again we're affecting the students and their ability to know
>
> what their grades are in their class, their ability to understand the material, their ability to
>
> have the material, to know the class. For me, it was things that were asked from the
>
> college, and being able to turn that information in when I was asked to turn that
>
> information in. It was again accreditation and making sure that we maintain our
>
> accreditation status.

However, Stephanie also felt uneasy submitting a formal plan of improvement. One of

the reasons for her discomfort was the fact that ever since she stepped into her new role as an

associate dean, the faculty member expressed to Stephanie her worries about being fired.

Although Stephanie repeatedly reassured the faculty member that there was no reason to fire her

unless her job duties were performed unsatisfactory, the faculty member kept on bringing up the

topic with Stephanie and other colleagues in the department. It got to the point that a few faculty

members expressed their concerns to Stephanie about the faculty's hallway conversations and the

repeated question – "Do you think Stephanie is going to fire me?" – which was very distracting

to others. Therefore, when the time came to address the shortcomings of the faculty member,

Stephanie hesitated. She shared that one of the reasons she stepped into the associate dean's role

was to "help faculty" and "not to make them lose their position." Stephanie reflected on her

dilemma as follows:

> Personnel issues is [sic] not what I wanted to do ever, so stepping into this one, and again
>
> having to, you know, having to be the one again to make that decision, and potentially
>
> have somebody's job terminated. On the one hand, it seemed to me clear, but at the same

time, I have that self-doubt, like, am I really doing the right thing? Is this really, you

know, does it really need to go this far? And again, on the one hand, I felt like, yes, but I

didn't wanna have to be the one to do it. So, it was really, it's really just more of that

personal, like, you know, not wanting to have to make that decision regarding someone

else's future.

In other words, even though the data pointed out the faculty's unsatisfactory behavior for quite

some time, making a formal decision of putting a faculty on a plan of improvement; thus,

establishing grounds for her termination, was not easy. Eventually, Stephanie arranged a meeting

with the faculty and a human resources specialist to have a difficult conversation. She described

feeling very uncomfortable during the meeting and was glad the human resources specialist took

over the conversation. Like James, Stephanie did not feel there was anything else she could do to

help the faculty change the problematic behavior. Besides, she thought it was not fair to others

who had the same duties and managed to complete them on time. Looking back, Stephanie

wished she had been more direct with a faculty member and had addressed the issue in a formal

way sooner.

 "It's Gonna Impact Their Life." The fear of negatively impacting individuals was also

reflected in other deans' responses. When I asked Nicole to explain what a difficult decision was

for her, she did not hesitate to include the impact on others as her very first definition:

A difficult decision. I can think of several different examples. One is, you know when

you have to make a person when you're dealing with people and it's gonna impact their

life … I really have, you know, connection with people that I work with here, and

knowing that I need to do my job. But at the same time, you know, I want things to be a

positive experience for people, and if I can shelter them from any of the red tape and

things like that. I do, I wanna do that, you know. I feel that's part of my job.

Lauren, who had to resolve a conflict between two faculty members and refused to apply punitive measures, kept on reminding herself that "people's careers are involved," and it was important to be "a caring and compassionate leader" and handle the issue "in the nicest way possible." Michael also mentioned that "to make a call that's gonna really have a potentially negative effect on an individual" is a difficult decision. He talked about the "human aspect" that comes into play in these decisions:

> I am human, and I want this person to walk away all right, you know, not broken …You try to let the person know that you still care. You care about them, and you know they are important … I don't want to deliver something or say something to a person that's going to break their spirits to the point that they can't move to the next stage.

A similar point of view was expressed by Aida, who pointed out her concern about the individuals involved in her decision-making: "I have to make sure that everybody walks out, like, maybe at least just a bit injured and not totally wiped out." Jackie, a dean who had experience with personnel dismissals, also shared the difficulty of impacting "somebody's livelihood":

> We ended up letting her go by the end of the semester. And so those are difficult decisions in the fact that you are trying to help somebody, but you are also trying to be fair to students. You want to be fair to your instructors because they are gonna have to pull more weight and cover, you know, more students and do more work … So, I mean letting somebody go is never an easy decision.

The difficulty of the decisions related to the "human component" as Courtney called it, caused her a lot of pressure and stress. She talked about "taking this stuff home" and having

"heavy feelings." Courtney thought that if she could make the same amount of money arranging

flowers or cleaning toilets, she would do it:

> It feels like there is a lot of pressure with these decisions, and you know you're not just
>
> looking at it for yourself, you're looking at it for students. You're thinking about the
>
> faculty you're impacting. You're thinking about how your co-workers are impacted.

In some instances, when the impact on the individual was perceived as severe, deans

were willing to do everything that was in their power to avoid it. Becky, a dean in health science

who had to make serious decisions about vaccination requirements for students and faculty

during the Covid-19 pandemic had to consider the impact of the requirements on some of her

faculty members. Becky shared how her decision to allow accommodations to those students

who did not want to get vaccinated stemmed from conversations with one of the faculty

members whose religious beliefs prevented her from being vaccinated. Becky confessed:

"Things that we were doing for the employees, we ended up deciding for students [allowing

accommodations for those who refused to get vaccinated] because we didn't want to fire our

employees either because they wouldn't get vaccinated."

Kathryn talked about how one of her decisions to advocate for a change in the policy was

influenced by a confession of a faculty member whose son was tragically killed. Kathryn shared

that the faculty member was reported to human resources for working a part-time job before five

o'clock which was not allowed by the college policy. Since Kathryn knew that the part-time job

was the only thing that brought the faculty joy after the death of her son, Kathryn was willing to

"bat for her":

> I went to my president, and I said: "I understand that the employee policy manual
>
> prevents working another job from eight to five, but faculty are different. We're holding

them under the same classification because that's what policy says. But I think we need

to realize that her son was tragically killed, and this is the only thing that brings her

happiness, and she's doing her job, and I think we should let her do the job," and he

agreed … But I was putting myself on the line there because HR had already made a

ruling against her … but you have to be, you have to humanize.

The examples above show that the possibility of a negative impact on others severely

complicated the decision-making of the participants. Concerns for the employees, their careers,

and future livelihoods clashed with the deans' sense of responsibility to do what was right for

their teams, students, and college. Although in all situations doing what was right differed based

on the circumstances, all academic deans felt the need to be fair to all involved. The need to find

a solution that would be fair for all paralyzed deans' decision-making and caused self-doubt and

emotional turmoil.

Challenged Personal Integrity

Other difficult decisions for the participants were those that challenged their personal

integrity. Deans talked about the importance of being truthful with oneself and aligning one's

actions with personal values. Michael, a military veteran who had to make tough decisions to

stay alive, thought it was important to take both his former experiences and his value system into

account when making decisions. "I'm not gonna be doing things that's gonna go against my

values and who I am as a person, you know? So, I think all of those things have to come into

play."

Victoria was also very careful about protecting her integrity when making difficult

decisions. It was important for her to feel that the decision she made was the right thing to do for

both the institution and the individual. Victoria tried to prioritize what was "in the best interest of

a real person" when making a difficult decision. "I have to be able to look myself in the mirror, you know, go to sleep at night, lay my head down, all those expressions that we have for maintaining our personal integrity."

Becky shared that the most difficult decisions for her are those with "a lot of gray," "where you have conflicting morals or ethics that are being tested in a situation, and one is pitted against the other." When thinking about these decisions Becky talked about the importance of personal integrity: "Hold your values and your beliefs in place, so that you don't compromise yourself when you make that decision." Since protecting one's integrity was important, situations that challenged the deans' guiding principles and beliefs and forced them to act against their value system caused a lot of emotional turmoil. The cases below demonstrate the tension between doing what one should and what one believed was the right thing to do.

"Every Time I Thought About That Student Taking a Zero, I Just Couldn't Live With It." Kathryn, an academic dean with 15 years of leadership experience who believes that going against a professor's syllabus is a "dangerous game" to play, recently had to take "a turn in her leadership" by going against the policies set by one of her faculty members to protect the student and do what she believed was the right thing. For a long time, Kathryn has been receiving complaints from various stakeholders about a faculty member who, in Kathryn's opinion, did not recognize who the community college students were and put barriers to their success. The faculty member, an experienced professor, a faculty senate president, and a person very well-versed in policy and procedure had a set of strict policies for his classes. One such policy required students to take the midterm examination in a testing center using a Lockdown browser and a password.

One of his students used the Lockdown browser but took the exam at home instead of the

testing center. The student shared with Kathryn that on the night of the exam, she was helping her mother pack "35 years of life," so they could move out of the family home because it needed to be sold as a part of the divorce settlement between her parents. The student failed to read the professor's requirements closely and ended up receiving a zero on that exam.

After investigating the student's transcript and related information, Kathryn found out that she was a "phenomenal student" who happened to make a mistake under a "tremendous amount of family pressure." For the first time, Kathryn decided to interact with the professor about his policies. She sent him an email outlining her request to either: "(a) allow her to retake the midterm in the testing center, or (b) give her the grade that she had originally earned because she did use a Lockdown browser." The professor rejected both of those options saying that it would be unfair to the students who did follow policy. Kathryn took it to "the next level" and communicated that she was now requiring the professor to choose one of the options. When reflecting on why Kathryn did what she did she shared:

What I'm describing to you was a weeklong process, lots of contemplating, thinking, sitting with myself. How does the decision feel? And in the end, every time I thought about that student taking a zero, I just couldn't live with it.

Kathryn could not go against her values. Siding with the faculty member in that situation meant betraying her values and beliefs. Kathryn explained:

We've just finished up our last of seven high school visits today. And I'm standing in front of those students, and I'm telling them that we're here to be a safe, proving ground in between high school and a four-year, or high school and employment. But then I, you know, I'm not backing it up when I have a professor that has these policies.

Despite Kathryn's demands, the professor chose to disobey and, instead, filed a

complaint against Kathryn to her supervisor. The supervisor sent him back to Kathryn with the

request to come to a resolution. After a few days, the professor agreed to allow the student to

retake the exam in the testing center; however, he wrote a letter of grievance against Kathryn to

be placed in her personnel file. Kathryn shared that it was one of the most challenging situations

in her career because she had "a good deal of respect" for the faculty member and did not want

to go against him. Yet, maintaining her personal values and integrity was more important.

"We Have to Stay Focused on Patient Safety." Becky, a dean of health sciences,

struggled with making some decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic because her integrity and

values were challenged. She started her career in education later in life after working as a nurse

for many years. Becky has always been passionate about making a difference for her patients,

first by working as a nurse, then by leading nurses as a staff development coordinator and a

director of nursing, and finally by applying her knowledge and skills in the educational setting.

Throughout her career, the following was her guiding question: "How can I change things to

make many more people healthy?"

Yet, when the pandemic started, she found herself in an "ethical quagmire" when

negotiating the requirements for the health science programs. On the one hand, she felt

responsible for patients' safety, which meant restricting access to clinicals for those students and

faculty who refused to vaccinate. On the other hand, she felt responsible for providing

educational opportunities for all students, and, therefore, finding a way of waving the vaccination

requirement for non-vaccinated:

> So, you just were in this really ethical quagmire. And what's right for the college?
>
> What's right for the students? What's right for the facilities? And, most of all, what's
>
> right for the patients that we're asking for them to be able to go take care of? And legally,

what's not going to get us in a big mess? And how am I going to keep myself from getting sued, because I keep somebody from getting their education?

Becky talked about the countless nights she spent trying to figure out how "not to become a test case for the Supreme Court," particularly when one of the students threatened to sue her and the college. Eventually, the division came up with a solution: students and faculty who were not willing to get vaccinated were allowed to receive accommodations through the religious exemption pathway which exempted them from the vaccination requirement. Becky shared: "Do I think the majority that filled them out really had a religious belief? I don't. I think they filled it out because they didn't want to take the vaccine, and it was a way out." Yet, ethically, Becky had a difficult time accepting it:

> When they would fill out the paperwork, it asked them to describe their religiously held belief, and they would just copy and paste it from the Internet word for word. And they were getting it off of sites that were coaching people to not get their vaccinations. And, you know, ethically, for me, that was just hard to accept that. And I would Google it. And it would just, it was verbatim … So, do I think they just used it as a pathway to get their way? But I don't get to, you know, police that, and it is what it is. We've made the accommodations we could make. Do I think they were comparable? Not always, but I think that sometimes the things you have to do is say: "I can live with this to get us through."

However, despite the risks, Becky never compromised her number one value: patient safety. For that reason, the students with an accommodation plan had to undergo a strict daily routine with continuous testing to ensure patient safety was not at risk. Becky talked about maintaining her integrity:

I will say I also didn't turn tail and run and say: "Oh, my God! Somebody's threatening to sue me, we should just give in and let everybody do this." That wasn't the thing to do either just because you got some pushback. And so, I'm just gonna give up my whole [integrity], you know? And as I kept telling my faculty along the way, we have to stay focused on patient safety, we've got to stay focused … There's a thing, you can't just waltz in there without a vaccine and go take care of people who are very susceptible to this disease. That's where we had to stay focused.

The two cases above are decisions in which academic deans had to choose between what they were supposed to do and what they believed was the right thing to do. In both cases, academic deans chose to stay true to their values and maintain their integrity. These cases further demonstrate decision-making situations in which academic deans were opposed to the upper administration's directives or actions. These cases reflect the moral conflict between doing what academic deans believed was the right thing to do in a given situation and what they were told to do by their superiors.

"Not Who I Am." Aida, an interim dean, shared a decision-making situation in which she had to choose between supporting a flawed agenda of upper administration or bringing the issue to the faculty senate for the dispute. Aida's choice was impacted by the lack of buy-in into her supervisor's actions. "I think some people are probably better at it than me, and I am not good at that because I can't sell something that I don't believe in," she said. In deciding what to do, Aida considered the consequences of her actions including the risk of not being promoted:

I thought about it for a really long time because also I'm an interim dean. I don't have a permanent seat at this table, and I feel like that it has been, maybe not overtly, but certainly implied that playing along and playing nicely goes a long way to you getting a

full-time job.

Yet, since the upper administrator's actions did not align with her values, Aida chose against supporting them. "So, I thought about it and thought about it, and I was finally like: No! Not who I am! Gotta tell. I gotta say something." After bringing up the issue to the senate representative, Aida's supervisor came to her office and asked her to prevent the issue from being discussed at the faculty senate meeting. When asked to describe her reaction to the supervisor's request Aida shared: "I felt super attacked, very tense because I was being asked to do something dishonest, something that I don't believe in."

Aida told the supervisor she would call the senate representative to suggest he talk to her supervisor before proceeding with mentioning the issue during the senate meeting. However, since she could not reach the representative on time, the meeting took place. Aida described the meeting as "contentious and awful" during which the supervisor could not answer the difficult questions that were posed by the faculty leading to the halt of the supervisor's agenda. When asked if Aida questioned her decision to go against her supervisor's agenda, she confessed that for her, advocating for faculty in that situation was an "ethical decision." "I felt like on behalf of the faculty … No, this cannot happen! That's, that's my job, right?" Although she worried about the ramifications of that decision for her career, she refused to go against her integrity.

"Anytime I Had Any Degree of Power to Do Something, I Was Going to." Like Aida, Courtney shared a situation when she did not agree with the actions of her upper administrator. Courtney was told that she and her immediate supervisor were not able to fire a poorly performing faculty member because of the personal agenda of one of the superiors, despite all the evidence that was collected against that faculty member. This is how Courtney described her reaction to the news:

I was disgusted. I was absolutely disgusted, and it made me lose all respect for him [superior], and so my visceral gut reaction was to be absolutely indignant and appalled. And she said: "I know I don't even know what to do." And then I said: "I think I'm gonna be sick, like physically sick." I did not, but I immediately felt nauseated in my stomach, because it felt like a huge betrayal for a self-serving reason from this person.

Fortunately, the poor-performing faculty member resigned and got employed somewhere else soon after. The news saved Courtney from further distress, but she was still experiencing emotional turmoil. Although the situation was resolved, Courtney could not stop thinking about what she would do if the faculty member ended up staying. She did not believe that allowing that faculty member to continue teaching was fair to students:

She was literally stealing money in the equivalent by not teaching and doing all of these things. So, I was getting student complaints, which is work for me. It's not fair to students which bothers me to my core, and then it was also knowing that this person was cheating them out of an education.

Since Courtney believed that the faculty member did not deserve to teach, she was willing to do everything that was in her power to fix the unfair situation, even if it involved working the system. Since she had to give the faculty the required workload, she was considering intentionally assigning her to late start classes, so she could not get an overload, or assigning her to as many online classes as possible, so the faculty had less face-to-face interaction with students:

You've already stolen enough money from this place, I'm not going to do anything that helps you out in any way. I'm also not going to be particularly nice to you. I am also not going to, you know, give you your preferred days and times. I'm going to use what we

are told to use, which is, you know, this is a student-based schedule, and you're a full-timer. You basically have to do this … I got so mad because it felt so unfair that anytime I had any degree of power to do something, I was going to, and, in some ways, it was mean-spirited, I'll be completely honest with you.

Courtney did not question her decision to make the faculty's work life miserable. "It was an easier decision than others, because at some point the balance is tipped, and it's not, it's - oh, no!" Hence, since the personal interests of Cortney's superior prevented her from dismissing the faculty by following standard procedures, she had to find another way to do what she believed was right. For Courtney, working the system and doing everything that was in her power to stop a faculty member from teaching was a way to restore justice and maintain her personal integrity.

"Integrity Is Probably the One Thing That I Will Never Give up." When talking about her difficult decisions Patricia talked about the challenge of "dealing with the egos" of her superiors. She shared that on several occasions her superiors gave her the responsibility to make decisions on certain issues, pre-approved the actions Patricia suggested, or even requested her to act in a particular way. Yet, once she followed through with the required steps, she would find herself at fault for doing exactly what she was told. Moreover, no explanation was provided on why her actions were not acceptable and how she could improve in the future.

Most recently, Patricia was approved to proceed with the display of students' work on the campus grounds. Together with her team she worked through the logistics and got appropriate permissions from her superiors. On the day the students' work was displayed, she received a phone call from her supervisors expressing their disapproval and anger. They were discontent because they were not aware of the student's work being displayed on that day and requested to

have it removed until further notice:

> I think in terms of difficult decisions those are difficult decisions because I truly in my heart felt like somebody's ego had gotten bruised because he [the superior] didn't know, and he didn't get the accolades for it. And so, I had to hurt the feelings and the pride of these students and the program director by having to push it back only so that now facilities and those guys can come back out and put it out later on because they've said: "We're gonna put them back out." But I don't know what kind of hoops we gotta jump through to get it put back out.

In a different, but similar situation, Patricia was approved to have an art installation in one of the campus buildings. The installation was funded by the grant that Patricia secured. Her superiors signed off on the grant which included a detailed art description. She worked with a team of multiple people and the artist to ensure the art was within the scope of what had been approved. As the artist was getting close to completing the work, Patricia reached out to her superiors for their feedback but did not hear back. When she followed up in two weeks, she was told that the art looked great, but they needed more time to consult with another person. A few days later, Patricia was told the art design did not match the expectations and was scolded for not presenting the mockup earlier. When she asked for recommendations on how the art design could be approved, she was told that it could not be changed and that she needed to return the grant money and pay the artist out of the college fund. However, the next day she received another phone call with a list of changes to the art design and the request to ensure that "this doesn't happen again." Such inconsistencies, along with the lack of transparency of what went wrong and how things can be improved in the future, made Patricia's job unpredictable and stressful. More importantly, Patricia felt her integrity was being challenged:

I have to decide ethically … Am I going to follow through in the things that we say? Or am I going to follow through in the things that we do? Because we say we're going to be transparent. Do I just say openly to the faculty and staff, here's where it is, and be transparent? Or do I do the things that we do, and continue to say that we're gonna be transparent but then fluff it all, so that we're not really transparent and that the executive leadership team is not the bad guy?

Patricia's emotional turmoil was intensified by her sense of professionalism. She did not believe blaming her superiors in front of faculty and students was professional and worthy of a good leader. Reflecting on her options, she said: "I have to, either to tell half-truths or to tell full-out lies, because I can't be 100% honest and transparent." Both options bothered Patricia ethically: "It just bothers me ethically because that's not who I am." When I asked Patricia to elaborate on her answer, she added, crying:

I would have to say, integrity is probably the one thing that I will never give up for anybody, and so I know, I say, that's an option, but I know that that's really not an option for me. And so, I know when I go back tomorrow, and I have to face people and answer these questions, I'm not gonna be able to lie, and so I'm gonna be stuck holding my fingers crossed and hoping that the repercussions to the executive leadership team are not too severe. And why do I feel so strongly about integrity? For me, I think integrity is about respect. And it's about respect for the people that I work with, and not only the people who I serve above me but the people who follow my leadership. And I wouldn't want somebody else lying to me, I don't like to play those games. And so, I'm not gonna do that to other people.

Overall, the cases described above indicate academic deans' unwillingness to go against

their own integrity and personal values. Even in situations with severe implications for their careers and reputation, deans chose to protect their integrity and, in Michaels's words, "to be in tune" with who they are. When faced with power imbalances, deans opted to do everything that was in their power to restore justice, even if it forced them to go against institutional practice or circumvent policies and procedures. They were not willing to compromise their value systems and chose to stay true to their beliefs in doing what they believed was the right thing to do. Courtney's quote summarizes this section well:

> The hardest and darkest days for me are when I am so pulled to do something that I know is the right thing, but then officially on paper, I can't. And then I try and figure it out. Is there some way I can work the system to really do it?

Risk of Damaged Relationships and Broken Trust

The decisions that posed a risk of ruining relationships with colleagues and losing their trust and respect were also difficult for academic deans. As middle-level administrators, deans often experienced emotional turmoil when trying to solve issues while also preserving relationships with representatives of opposing parties. Courtney confessed that decisions could become complicated when personal relationships are involved and when there is a fear that trust can be broken:

> I think that things get very muddied when you work with people for a very long time, you become friendly with them, but you might have to go against something that they believe in at a meeting, or might have to go against something that they think … Do I agree with you? Do I disagree with you? Do I do it publicly? Do I tell you privately later?

Jackie mentioned the importance of being consistent when making difficult decisions to ensure she could maintain her colleagues' trust and respect. When describing one of her

challenging decision-making situations, Jackie pointed out the fear of losing the respect of her colleagues. She said:

> I make sure that I maintain consistency, so that I didn't look like I was, you know, dumbing it down, or, you know, doing something unethical or something like that. Because you kinda worry about, you know, all this time these people have respected me, and now are they gonna see me in a different light?

James thought that losing the trust of his colleagues could lead to severe consequences for his career: "People look at you negatively, and then they may not, I guess work with you well." James pointed out that losing the trust of his colleagues could mean not being moved forward in promotion.

Lauren also talked about the risk of losing her colleagues' trust. In her opinion, maintaining credibility was very important. She believed that with every wrong decision some of the credibility was lost. "If you continue to make bad difficult decisions, you're not gonna be seen as credible, so you won't have people to lead."

"Where Is My Loyalty?" When talking about difficult decisions, Courtney described the challenge of knowing what to share and what not to share with colleagues. Courtney said she has a great relationship with her supervisor, who often confides in Courtney by sharing information that she does not share with other associate deans. Although Courtney appreciates her supervisor trusting her with important information, she feels uncomfortable keeping what she shows from her colleagues:

> It kind of feels sleazy at times because I now feel like I sit on information that could really potentially help my colleagues. And then, when we sit in a meeting, and she decides to loop us all in, I have to pretend like it's the first time I've ever heard it,

whereas it might be something for the last couple of weeks that I've known was brewing and coming down … I am thrilled that she gives me the information that I have because it clues me in on things. But then I ask myself: "Where's my loyalty? Do I keep my mouth shut because she has told me x, y, and z? Or do I go to my colleagues and share because this can impact them?"

Courtney described struggling to make decisions when put in such a position and felt like her "ethics" were being questioned: "Do you follow the hierarchy? Do you loop your colleagues in? Because if it was [sic] anybody else you probably would." On one hand, she is afraid of sharing the information with her colleagues because she wants to maintain trust with her supervisor and does not want to stop receiving "future intel." Besides, Courtney has always prided herself on "being a person that if you share a confidence with me, I keep it." On the other hand, she worries about ruining her relationship with her colleagues and appearing as someone who "sat on a secret" that could have helped them. Overall, the risk associated with losing trust with either party severely complicated her decision-making.

"Having to Build Rapport and Trust While You're…Working out a Situation."

Michael experienced one of his most difficult decision-making situations when he first stepped into the dean's position. Shortly after he assumed his duties, Michael started receiving complaints from students about a faculty member. After investigating the situation and talking to multiple students in the instructor's classes, Michael soon figured out that this was a discrimination case. The instructor was unfairly treated by his colleagues in the program who instigated student complaints against him. As a new dean, who was hoping to build trust with his new team, this situation could jeopardize his efforts. When talking about the problem, Michael shared the difficulty of developing and maintaining trust with both parties:

I hadn't established any type of trust with him who I'm trying to advocate for. Nor had I really established any type of rapport with the other staff as well. It wasn't, you know, enough time … So, yeah, yeah, just think about it … just having to build rapport and trust while you're, you know, just kind of working out a situation at the same time. So that was a challenge, you know.

In sum, recognizing that building trust takes hard work, Michael worried about having a bad start with his new team. He shared: "Just having to manage and supervise employees who, you know, probably dislike me because of this. I mean, that was probably a risk right there." Consequently, risking relationships complicated Michael's decision-making even further.

"If I Lose That Respect … It's Gonna Be a Problem Moving Forward in a Program." Lauren also worried about losing the trust and respect of her colleagues when deciding on her most challenging situation. She supervised two faculty members who were hostile toward one another. The disagreements that the faculty members publicly expressed at various meetings were not conducive to a professional environment and started impacting other colleagues. When the human resources specialist told Lauren that it was her job to "handle the situation" after offering some punitive ideas, Lauren realized that she did not want to lose either one of these faculty members and had to come up with a different solution. Lauren shared:

In my mind, it was never about I was gonna ask someone to leave or step down, or transfer. It was all always about - how can we rectify the situation. So that at least they can respect one another and do what they need to do as far as the program is concerned.

Eventually, she came up with a solution. Instead of reprimanding the faculty, she decided to make them teach a course together. Since both faculty members had similar specialties, Lauren believed working together would allow them to learn about each other's experiences, make them

see each other's passion for the subject matter, and, therefore, make them respect each other.

However, making this decision was very risky for Lauren. She worried about losing trust and respect for making a decision that nobody in her professional circle supported. Lauren shared her fears about losing her colleagues' credibility:

I was new to the role. I was their boss for less than a year. I thought the risk would be if this blows up, the lack of any respect and trust I have already earned from the group, which was an uphill battle to begin with. So that was my biggest concern.

Therefore, similarly to the cases described above, Lauren worried about losing the trust of her colleagues. "I didn't think I would lose my job or anything like that, but I thought, well, you know if I lose that respect but little I have, you know it's gonna be a problem moving forward in a program." Thus, the risk of a potentially negative impact of her actions on relationships with others made Lauren's decision-making more difficult.

"Is this Gonna Change Our Relationship?" Nicole's difficult decision-making situation became even more complicated when she realized it could impact her relationship with colleagues. The issue began with a grade appeal from a student who did not believe the grade she received on the final paper for the English class was justified. Among the supporting documentation, the student submitted a letter from the employee of the tutoring center written on the student's behalf. The employee also worked as an adjunct instructor teaching English and ESL courses. The letter stated that the student visited the tutoring center, and the tutor who reviewed the paper did not believe the student deserved to get a D on that assignment.

Consequently, the English department, which is under Nicole's purview, including the department head and the instructor who taught the course became furious with the tutor and demanded to have him fired. They believed the tutor overstepped his responsibilities by offering

his opinion to the student without consulting the faculty member, particularly considering the student did not follow the assignment instructions and the rubric. The department was very concerned about the way the tutor performed his tutoring responsibilities, especially since at some point in the past the faculty member had to go over the requirements of his course with the tutor because of a similar issue.

For Nicole, a grade appeal issue quickly turned into a personnel issue with many stakeholders involved. On the one hand, Nicole needed to support the faculty member and the department she oversaw. On the other hand, she wanted to preserve the relationships with her fellow dean and the associate dean responsible for overseeing the tutoring center who did not believe the tutor's dismissal was the right decision. The situation that unfolded posed a risk of "damaging the relationships" with at least one of the groups, not to mention that the tutor's employment was at stake, and there was an unhappy student. Nicole shared:

> You're kind of, you know, just right in the middle. Anna [the name has been changed], who is new to her role as an associate dean; she and I have worked together for years. She used to work in student services, but just recently moved into this role. So, it was also one of the first times that we had to work on a challenging personnel situation together. So, you know, I think there was a risk of you know - Is this gonna change our relationship?

The cases above demonstrate that decisions can become very challenging when trust, respect, and relationships with others are involved. The academic deans had to consider the implications of the decisions that entailed the risk of damaged relationships with their colleagues. For many of them, such implications involved not only broken trust and lost respect, but serious consequences for their ability to manage others. The desire to maintain healthy relationships and

trust often pushed the deans to look for creative solutions for their problems that could satisfy all parties involved.

Risk of Negative Perceptions

Another aspect of a challenging decision centered around people's perceptions and deans' inability to address them. Some deans pointed out that making everyone happy was an impossible task and being liked by everyone was not their goal. This aspect of a challenging decision is evident in a comment from Aida: "Priority can't be that everybody likes me at the end of it. That's almost never gonna happen!" However, deans often had to consider how various stakeholders would perceive their decisions and how these decisions could be interpreted in the future. Victoria shared: "In the back of my mind I'm always thinking about the impact on my reputation, and how others perceive me at the institution, and how the individuals that I supervise will proceed with the decision."

To prevent others from forming negative perceptions, deans took care to maintain clarity, transparency, and consistency in making decisions and setting a good example. For instance, Michael, although not concerned with being liked by others, took care to set a good example even when performing simple, routine actions, such as checking a document before signing. He hoped in doing so he modeled the desired behavior to his employees.

Becky also mentioned the need for "very open conversations and truthful conversations" during difficult times. She pointed out that the best decision is "not always a decision based on satisfying the most people" but rather the one that "sets a precedent for how you're gonna handle these situations forward that does the least harm." "Being liked by everyone is not a priority," she added. Becky also warned about the danger of "hardline decisions":

I think anytime a leader makes that decision when they're gonna give a hard "no" and all the way "no," you better be prepared to back that up with, you know, both some legal and ethical groundwork that decision has behind it. Or you're gonna be in trouble with it, and you are gonna be before the Supreme Court because I think there are just some situations that are so great that you've gotta be willing to think outside of the box, be open to some other ways of viewing it.

Kathryn concurred with Becky's statement. She said: "You have to think it ahead, you know. If I make this decision, what are the ramifications for future decisions?" Like Becky, she was concerned with making "hardline" decisions. "Whenever you draw a hard line in the sand, you're setting yourself up for problems."

Similarly, to Becky and Kathryn, Victoria also talked about setting a precedent. She tried to make sure that the precedent she was setting by a certain decision was not something she would regret later. "Is it something that's going to create more problems for others moving forward?"

"Twisted and Distorted." Despite the care that deans took in being consistent and setting the right precedent, they still could not escape from people's perceptions. Nicole stated: "You know that this office is a continually revolving door of incidents like that, and again, the perceptions and the rumors will start, and you know things will happen." Kathryn also shared how wrong perceptions are formed and her approach to addressing them:

They talk about you, right? So, they can't wait to get back to their offices and talk about you, and that often gets back, of course. It's been through whatever that game was when you were little - the phone game, you know. It's been twisted and distorted.

Kathryn pointed out that she often feels a need to address the inaccuracies spread by others, but it is very infrequently that she does it. The only reason she would address the distorted information is to prevent faculty members from "going down the wrong path." Kathryn also noted that "there are preconceived notions" in her division about the way she will decide about something. She often has to ask her colleagues to give her the "professional courtesy of a fresh start."

"Problem Dean." Deans shared that people's "twisted and distorted" perceptions could have serious implications on academic deans' reputations. The idea of becoming a "problem dean" worried some of the participants despite handling difficult situations to the best of their abilities. For example, Aida mentioned how she would be "pointed out" because the conflict started with a faculty member in her department. "So, it shouldn't be my fault, but it is because the person who brought it up came from my campus, so it must have been my responsibility."

Like Aida, Kathryn, whose challenging decision-making situation I described earlier in this chapter, worried about "tarnishing her name in an administrative role." She was concerned about becoming a problem dean if the faculty member continued his complaints against her. Kathryn reflected on the consequences of negative perceptions of her team on her reputation:

> I do have aspirations to be the vice president of academics … So, there's a lot on the line, right, my reputation. And once again, I'm gonna go before my peers and ask them to entrust me with even more responsibility, you know. So, had that gone poorly, there would have been ramifications for that, as well. And there may be. There may be.

Nicole also mentioned the unfortunate consequences of people's perceptions on the reputation of her fellow dean. She shared how a faculty member she supervised might have perceived her fellow dean as "a little stern" and "a little aggressive." After sharing his perceptions with the department, the rumors started spreading:

When Scott [the faculty member; the name has been changed] went back and shared with his department, which then shared with the rest of, you know, the rumor mill gets going. And then it made, you know, Oliver [fellow dean, the name has been changed] in some people's eyes to not appear in such a good light, which is unfortunate because he's also applying for the vacant VP job or the open VP job here on our campus. And so, we're thinking that there are negative ripple effects there.

As noted above, deans were aware of the risks people's perceptions posed to their reputation. Interestingly, even after solving a complicated issue, deans were still concerned with appearing as problem deans. Two deans believed in being perceived as responsible for the actions of people in their divisions regardless of the outcome.

"It Could Undermine My Leadership and My Followers' Willingness to Follow Me." Patricia, who had to manage the inconsistencies of the upper administration's approach described earlier in this chapter, also worried about the perceptions of the faculty and students she leads. Patricia talked about the lack of clear expectations from her upper administration and the damaging effect of "ever-changing rules" that constantly undermined her authority to make decisions and act on them. Since Patricia is consistently given responsibility without any decision-making power, she often finds herself in a position where she needs to "smooth things over" by taking the blame on herself. Although this approach allows her to protect the upper administration's reputation, she worries it could undermine her leadership and her followers' willingness to follow her. "Why would they want to keep doing all kinds of work towards something if they don't feel like in the end, I'm following through on my end to do things?" Thus, there was a risk to her reputation.

"The Biggest Secret Keeper." Participants shared that some of the most challenging

situations occur when academic deans are unable to address people's perceptions because of the confidentiality of a situation. Nicole described that often she felt like "the biggest secret keeper of the world" because of all the things that were happening in the division that she could not talk about:

> One of the hardest things for me are [sic] people's perceptions, because, you know, you can have, you maybe made a decision. You know there was a certain situation going on, and then it's a personnel issue, so you can't say anything. But that person then goes out and spends a completely different tail, and you can't defend yourself. You know you can't because I can't talk about it. You know I can't. And if people knew the whole story, then they might think about it differently. But I think that was huge for me in adjusting to this role.

> Jackie had a similar experience. When she first stepped into the dean's position, she had to resolve a conflict with one of the faculty members. After one of the confrontations with the faculty member, she wanted to defend herself to another employee who witnessed the incident, but she could not do it:

> I'm standing in my doorway, and she had her cup of coffee, and I was waiting for it to either hit me or whatever. And I just remember one of the nursing faculty was at the copier, like kind of witnessing everything, and I just kind of stood there, and, I mean, I was stunned, you know… Everybody could hear it in the hallway, so I just remember the nurse at the copier when she left, and I just kind of had this look. And she said: "Oh, she reminds me of somebody," and I was just like, you kind of wanted to give your side, and I had to take a step back and say: "That's not appropriate."

As demonstrated by the cases in this section, the decisions that academic deans must

make can become challenging when there is a risk of colleagues' negative perceptions. In some instances, it is in the academic deans' power to address these perceptions, or as Nicole said, "to clean it up." However, often deans are unable to handle the rumors and perceptions that start spreading because it is their job to keep personal issues confidential. Although deans understand they cannot make everybody happy, and they learned "to grow a thick skin," they are still concerned about the consequences of people's negative perceptions on their reputation. A lost reputation or reputation of a problem dean could undermine their leadership, prevent them from securing a promotion, and have a damaging impact on their professional relationships and success.

Deans' Confidence: From Self-Doubt to Growth

The challenge of finding a solution to a difficult decision seemed to be intensified by the idea that a good leader would know what to do and would be able to make decisions quickly, confidently, and effectively. Yet, many academic deans struggled. Often the challenge was due to the complexity of the situation and lack of experience. While deans knew it was their job and responsibility to make a decision, the lack of confidence that they felt in those difficult decision-making situations made them doubt themselves and their leadership abilities.

Lack of Confidence and Self-Doubt

When asked to describe how difficult decisions impacted her personally and professionally, Victoria mentioned doubting herself. "I think they create some doubts, and I probably have a little bit of, to be honest, I think that's where imposter syndrome creeps in or self-doubt creeps in." She also questioned her leadership abilities: "You can't even make this decision, you know, you can't hold the line. So, I start doubting myself as a leader."

Even though almost all deans searched for guidance from colleagues and supervisors,

many felt that they were alone in their decision-making because, at the end of the day, they had the final say. Often asking others for input made deans question their leadership abilities even more. As Victoria reflected on how her most difficult decision was different from other decisions she had to make as a dean, she mentioned that it was the decision where she struggled the most with self-doubt:

> I could hear a narrative in my mind - a better manager, a better leader, a better dean, would know how to do this. It would be easier for them. It would be clear-cut. Why am I struggling so much? I think some of that imposter syndrome or feelings of confidence came in because I was like - Why am I? Why am I struggling with this so much? Everybody else seems to have a really quick, clear answer, and it's really difficult for me. So, compared to some other decisions, that created more inner turmoil too, and more about my own confidence as a dean.

Lauren also doubted herself in her most difficult decision-making situation. After the human resources specialist told her: "It's your decision," she approached several people asking for input on her idea. Yet, similarly to Victoria, asking others for advice did not make her feel she was doing the right thing:

> I was new in my leadership role. I was questioning if it was a good decision because I didn't have years of experience to say this could work. Everybody that I talked to and literally everybody had something negative to say about it; it wouldn't work. I probably talked to four or five people, and after the fourth or fifth – no, I'm like, I'm not talking to anybody else. I just need to think about this and make a decision.

Patricia shared that often after making a difficult decision her "anxiety kicks in," and she starts rethinking everything over again: "I just beat myself up over the decisions." Aida also

talked about her struggles: "I'm constantly reflecting on whether or not I did the right thing, right? And I have a tendency to ask other people for input. To check myself to make sure I'm not being unreasonable."

James described how he felt like "a bad person" because of the decisions he had to make, and that feeling, along with the understanding that no one else could decide for him, made his decision-making process a challenge. Reflecting on his experience, James noted that one of the things he would do differently is to have more confidence in himself. He also added that he would put more focus on clarity in his communication, so he did not have to question himself:

> I think I would focus more on just trying to be very clear. And trying to think for myself, in terms of confidence and so on. Maybe I'd just be clear, document that I'm being clear so that I don't question was I clear or not.

Stephanie also did not always feel confident she was making the right decision: "Sometimes you just have to live with the decisions that you make at the time." Stephanie added that the fear of making a wrong decision made her feel anxious. "I'm anxious that, I don't want to, I don't want to make a bad decision."

Becky also talked about self-doubt and uncertainty. "I think I always have a little bit of uncertainty of - Am I making the right decision? Or am I handling this right?" However, as an experienced leader, she viewed uncertainty and self-doubt as positive traits. Becky believed uncertainty helped to analyze the situation deeper and consider all the details:

> I actually think that's a good thing because it makes you delve into the problem where it pushes you to look at all the different aspects, get all the information you can, not make a snap judgment, you know … Uncertainty of yourself I think is a good thing. If you're always so sure of yourself, and you just want to revel off an answer like that, you

probably jumped to a conclusion or made a snap judgment. That's probably not the best decision.

Participants indicated that they doubted themselves when making difficult decisions. Interestingly, lack of confidence and self-doubt were common among deans with different levels of experience in the position, not only among those new to their roles. Moreover, the need to choose a solution to a challenging problem made some deans doubt not only their decision-making skills but also their skills and abilities in leading others.

Learning and Growth

Although deans experienced a lot of self-doubt in the decision-making process, making the decision and experiencing the consequences helped them learn and grow both personally and professionally. Some deans shared that difficult decisions helped them to discover their values and learn about themselves. Aida shared: "Here is an important life lesson where you learn the kind of person that you are, and in that situation, I learned what kind of person I am."

Like Aida, Becky described how challenging decisions that she and her colleagues had to make during the COVID-19 pandemic helped them learn about themselves and come out "stronger and better on the back side of it." Becky stated:

> We learned a lot about ourselves, our ability to think through a problem, and our ability
>
> to control ourselves and our emotions through that and to work our way through it, and I
>
> think in the end that's a positive outcome. It wasn't fun while we were in.

James talked about using various decision-making situations as an opportunity to learn and grow. He aspires to one day step into the community college vice president's or a president's role which could significantly reduce the number of colleagues he could ask for advice. Therefore, he is practicing becoming more confident with each decision he makes:

If I'm the president of the college, there's no other person at that institution I could talk

to, I'll have to talk to other people outside of the institution at that point if I'm thinking of

advice. So, I'm using what I can from colleagues, but know that with the decision that I

make I try to grow more confident in the decision.

Patricia also said that making difficult decisions helps her to grow professionally and

helps her to "be a stronger person and a stronger leader." Similarly, Jackie pointed out that her

challenging decision-making situation was a great learning experience that "put her on a good

trajectory" for her future. When reflecting on that experience, she shared: "I probably didn't

handle things, you know as well as I could have in some situations … But you learn, you know.

You learn kinda over time."

Victoria shared about her learning and growth as a result of going through challenging

decision-making situations. Her description shows well the contrast between the perception of "a

good leader" and the reality of uncertainty and self-doubt echoed in other cases. With

experience, she finally realized that uncertainty and self-doubt were a normal part of the

decision-making process:

I learned that there's not always a right decision, even though I want there to be one, so

just make a decision, and you deal with how it works out ... But I think as moving

forward I am more comfortable being uncomfortable or more comfortable saying, - Yeah,

that's really tough, and I don't know. And more comfortable just not having all the

answers. And I think when I first started as a dean, I felt like I needed to be much more

certain about everything like a good leader. I think I had an image that I carried with me

of what a leader does and what a leader looks like, and that person had many visions for

how things should be, was very confident and certain, and I think in my own experience,

is that that's just not who I am as a leader. I don't have the certainty all the time, and I think it's more courageous sometimes to try just to kind of go and say – "I think this is the right thing," and I may have to admit this was a mistake at some point. But we're gonna try.

Deans valued the learning that happened during difficult decision-making situations. Many deans believed they were becoming better decision-makers and better leaders because of the challenges that they had to encounter in the process. Victoria noted that much of what she learned was a result of mistakes. "It's like, oh, I don't wanna feel that way again. I don't wanna make someone else feel that way again. So, you learn from the mistakes."

Nicole added that learning was an unavoidable part of the process, and the more she learned, the more her self-confidence grew. Nicole stated: "I feel like I can make a lot of decisions on my own now … I've researched it so much in the past that I am like, okay, I know what I'm doing here, you know."

Michael mentioned that with experience in making decisions, he built more confidence and more understanding of himself in general and himself in the dean's role. With experience, he learned that he indeed could make decisions, no matter how draining they were. He said that he chose to look at all challenging situations from a positive side while understanding that they "come with the territory":

It comes with the territory. But yeah, so you have to make those decisions just to kind of keep things flowing as best as possible. But also know that – hey, you know, at least you're getting used to making them. You can make these decisions.

Although Lauren hates being under pressure when making important decisions, over the years she learned to make "quick decisions" that are good. Lauren also learned to refrain from

self-criticism and can recover quicker if the decision she makes is not a good one. Lauren knows she will do better next time. With every creative decision she makes, her confidence grows. When reflecting on her most challenging situation, Lauren noted:

> I was only a couple of years into the leadership role. So, let's say I was more naive. So, I wanted just one person to say: "Hey, try and see what happens." And no one did. Now, if I thought it was a good idea, I wouldn't need that support.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that experiencing self-doubt and lack of confidence was common when academic deans faced challenging decision-making situations. Often difficult decisions not only made them doubt their ability to make decisions but also made them question their ability to lead effectively. In some cases, this self-doubt stemmed from the mismatch between deans' experiences and the image of an ideal leader they envisioned. While trying to ease the emotional turmoil associated with a challenging decision, academic deans asked for input and advice from their colleagues. However, instead of finding the solution, they would often find themselves questioning their decision-making and leadership abilities even more.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges, making decisions in difficult situations provided academic deans with an opportunity for learning and growth. Academic deans believed that the more experience they had making decisions, the better they were at decision-making. Overall, making difficult decisions helped deans learn about themselves and their values, gave them more confidence in making decisions, and, as a result, helped them to become better leaders.

Emotional Intelligence in Decision-Making

The cases revealed five emotional intelligence skills manifested in academic deans' decision-making. Deans talked about their abilities (a) to recognize the emotions of others, (b) be aware of their own emotions, (c) regulate their emotions, (d) understand the emotions of others,

and (e) manage the emotions of others. In this section, I will describe themes related to each of the skills and the ways academic deans applied each skill to their decision-making. I will begin this section with a description of general strategies academic deans in this study used to make decisions and will then continue with the report of the findings related to the manifestation of emotional intelligence in decision-making. The summary of the key findings will be presented at the end of the section.

Collecting and Considering All Relevant Information

Among strategies that academic deans implemented consistently when making decisions was collecting and considering all relevant information. Gathering all facts was necessary for deans to be able to look at the situation in its entirety. "I definitely wanna gather all of the facts that I can … I need to pull in the facts and look at the whole situation, and also, it's not just that situation, but it's the bigger picture," mentioned Nicole when talking about the importance of collecting information.

For academic deans, collecting information meant getting everybody's opinions and points of view. They stressed the importance of always hearing all the sides involved. Becky pointed out that looking at all the sides was "laborious" and took a lot of time. She noted that hurrying to make a decision was her natural reaction in many situations, but it was essential to allow everyone to tell their perspectives if she wanted to make a good decision. Becky explained:

> The thing that I learned over the years definitely is I need to hear all the sides of the story because it is just like the fog of war. The initial reports that come out are usually not the truth. They are being impacted by perspective. By, he said, she said, whatever. And you really need to not jump to conclusions that you need to hear all the sides of the story …

You know cause you've got to lead your people to think that way too, especially when you've got leaders under you.

Nicole believed that asking people for their opinions and thoughts on a situation was a way of showing them respect. For Aida, getting everybody's opinion was the most important factor in making decisions. She particularly stressed considering the opinions of people who were not invited to make a decision. Aida shared:

The most important thing to me is making sure that we're taking into account all the people who do not get to help us make this decision. You didn't get a vote, and whatever decision I make is going to impact you, and I didn't ask you because that's not the way that this works. You don't get to sit at the table, I do. But I feel like, since I get to set the table, then I have a responsibility to make sure that whatever decision gets made is not disproportionately impacting you.

Focusing on collecting and considering all relevant information helped academic deans remove their emotions from their decision-making. Stephanie mentioned that gathering the information from all the different sides and focusing on "getting that big overview picture" allowed her "to begin to take some of that emotional piece out of it." Lauren also observed that information helped her to keep her emotions out of the decision-making:

I really feel that emotions are involved in a lot of stuff, but with more information, it's almost like you can write out a formula that says okay, this is what we're gonna do because we have this information, and this is where we want to go … So, information really helps, at least me.

Similarly, Kathryn noted that consideration of all facts often made the right decision apparent. "Not easy, but it is apparent." She added: "Then I feel comfortable that I did my due

diligence, and it is my job to make the decision. And so, it doesn't affect me too much personally."

Using Policy

Using policy was another important part of academic deans' decision-making. In most instances, the policy helped deans decide. Kathryn noted that the "nine times out of ten' policy made it "crystal clear what the decision is." Jackie mentioned that the following policy helped her to maintain consistency in her decision-making:

Anytime I'm making a decision it is based on policy … Even when I've been questioned about some of my decisions, I can come back and say - "This is why I made it." … I really don't get challenged from anybody about my decisions, and I think I've kind of proven that like I've had that consistency on.

However, in some situations, policy complicated the deans' decision-making. Victoria shared that the most difficult decisions for her were the ones "where there is tension between policy, rules, and practice" and what she thought was in the best interests of the parties involved. "I guess it's those situations where I'll say policy or rules seem to rub against my intuition on what is the right thing for the student or the faculty member with whom I'm working," explained Victoria.

Becky noted the policy did not always serve as the best guide. According to her, not every situation could benefit from the policy. "There are flaws in every system," said Becky. "You've got to be able to find those, and grab those, and point them out and say, there really is a better way to do this."

Kathryn believed that some policies no longer applied to certain situations. "You know so many things we do now, don't apply, and you get trapped in a situation where you're trying to

apply a policy that doesn't fit," pointed out Kathryn. However, she believed such situations

could be beneficial: "That's also a real opportunity as an administrator to find out when you need

to rewrite policy and be a leader at your institution, and say - Has anybody looked at this policy

since 1986?"

Considering Decision Consequences and Institutional Priorities

Considering the consequences and ramifications of their decisions was also very

important for academic deans. Deans took the time to consider the consequences of their

decisions for the individuals involved, for their immediate team, program, division, college, and

its reputation, and most importantly, the students they served. The consequences for student

success stood out the most in the deans' responses. Patricia expressed well the idea repeated by

all deans:

> I think students have to be the top priority, and I think in any decision that we make as a
>
> college institution, we have to prioritize the students because they are our customers, and
>
> they are who we are here to serve … That doesn't necessarily mean making a decision
>
> that they like, but it's what I perceive, and my experience, and my expertise as being in
>
> their best interest.

In considering the consequences, deans imagined the impact their decision could make on

various stakeholders, tried to envision various steps of the decision implementation process, and

considered their alternatives in the case of failure. "I have a tendency to think about what this

looks like six months from now because we have a tendency to make very short-term decisions,

which are also going to be really bad in the end," said Aida when asked about her approach to

decision-making.

Thinking about college priorities and financial and legal ramifications also guided deans'

decision-making. When making personnel decisions, Stephanie ensured her decisions were legal from a human resources standpoint. She tends to ask herself: "What can I do? What shouldn't I do? What are the things that I can say and can't say?"

Michael noted the importance of considering strategic plan priorities when making decisions. "The college itself is a business. You really have to know what the strategic plan is. You know, from the president on down," he said. He also mentioned the necessity to think about decisions from a financial perspective. "There are tough decisions within that," he added. Similarly, Patricia mentioned considering college priorities and ensuring her decisions aligned with them:

> I try to align and make sure that the things that I'm doing are in the best interest of the students first of all, of the employees that are gonna be enacting it, and then the college. I guess, and the community engagement piece of the college, and how that would be involved.

Overall, when making decisions, deans' priority was in collecting and considering all relevant information by getting everyone's opinions and perspectives. Referring to policy was another priority; although, in some instances, deans noted the need for policy change. Academic deans also considered institutional priorities and reflected on the consequences of their decisions for various stakeholders while focusing on student success.

However, deans did not reject the existence of emotions when facing difficult decision-making situations. "I don't know that I can fully ever disconnect from the emotional piece," shared Stephanie. Deans noted that experiencing emotions was human nature and confessed to experiencing a wide range of emotions when making decisions. In the subsections below, I will present five emotional intelligence skills along with the ways academic deans used them in their

decision-making.

Emotion Recognition

The ability to recognize the emotions of others was one of the emotional intelligence abilities that manifested in deans' decision-making. Nine academic deans mentioned recognizing people's emotions when communicating with them for decision-making purposes. Consistent with the theoretical framework (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019), deans' emotion recognition included paying attention to people's body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Some deans also paid attention to the words individuals used at a particular moment. Four deans noted that the ability to recognize the emotions of others guided them in decision-making as it allowed them to choose an appropriate communication strategy.

Choosing an Appropriate Communication Strategy

Victoria pointed out that making decisions without considering the individuals' emotional response was "dangerous." That is why she always watched for people's reactions and their body language. Victoria even considered what individuals said and the words they chose: "I'm an English major, sometimes even the words they choose, and they chose that word, and not a different one, but that makes me think they're a little more hurt or a little angrier, a little more afraid."

Victoria believed that being able to "get a sense of where people are" and recognizing that some "are emotionally not where you want them to be" was very valuable, particularly in situations when everyone's support was needed for an initiative. Victoria thought that her ability to recognize the emotions of others helped her in decision-making:

I'm seeing so and so, and they're kind of withdrawn from the conversation so they're not liking what we're talking about here. It's making them uncomfortable, or something

happened. So, I need to maybe back up and investigate that. So, I think there's probably

helps [sic] in some ways to working with the "people" part of when you're making

decisions.

The ability to recognize the emotions of others helped Victoria choose an appropriate

communication strategy. Sometimes she would change the delivery of her message based on the

individual's emotional reaction. Victoria described her approach:

I'm not gonna give them that detail yet because I can tell that they are upset and they're

processing something, so that was not the time for me to lay out the whole piece. Or I

might be sharing something that sounds like good news, and I can see someone getting

excited. But then there's this other piece that I know. So, I'm like I need to go ahead and

mention that before they get too excited about this news, right, for they get to let their

fantasy, you know, go too far.

Becky believed that a great leader must be able to "sense where your people are at any

given minute." Similarly, Becky used her ability to recognize the emotions of others to guide her

communication strategy. It helped her to decide what to say and in which manner:

You gotta read their body language … You gotta read their tone and expression. And you

gotta know, is this the right moment to approach this, or would you be better to go back

to your office and see how things are tomorrow? Or would it be better to put this in an

email and explain it? Is that gonna be a better way to communicate today than trying to

be, you know, come across in an oral manner, because sometimes that can make it,

sometimes email can make it worse. Sometimes you wanna go - "Nope, do not need to

put this in an email." You've got to talk this out.

Stephanie also talked about paying attention to the emotions of other people. Like

Victoria and Becky, Stephanie adjusted her responses based on people's emotional reactions. Stephanie shared:

> I do try to pay attention to people's body language … and the words, I mean not just the words, but like the tone of the words and then their expressions to go along with that. And try to then match, again matches not quite the right word, but changing the way that I might say something or what I'm thinking, based on that … I can tell they feel bad about what just happened, then okay, let me, let me soften this up a little bit, just to try to again, match them or to bring them up.

Michael also mentioned adjusting his communication strategy when noticing a change in people's body language and emotional reactions. He pointed out that it was easy for him to determine when an individual was "shutting down." Often, to address this reaction, Michael would do "check-ins" or "follow-ups" to bring out the emotions that caused an individual to withdraw. In short, for most deans, emotion recognition appeared as a useful skill that guided their communication strategy.

Learning Emotion Recognition in Childhood

Some of the deans who perceived themselves as adept at recognizing the emotions of others shared learning this ability in childhood. Victoria mentioned growing up with a mother who had mental health issues. "I think even very young I probably learned how to read what was happening and adjust my own behavior to manage that."

Similarly, Nicole shared growing up "in a very tumultuous house" and going through the divorce of her parents. She often thought of herself as a "peacemaker" trying to please everyone around. "I really think I started developing those skills at a young age because I had to pick up on people's emotions to know how my day is gonna go."

Aida believed she was "pretty good at reading people" for similar reasons. Besides having a communication background, Aida mentioned growing up with four siblings. "You get really good at knowing what people are thinking because that is going to largely dictate how your day goes, right, and so I find that to be… I think I'm good at that," she noted. Aida also added that although many people in her circle were "responsive" to her emotion recognition ability, others confused that ability for "sensitivity" which, according to Aida, was not true. "I don't think I am particularly sensitive. I just already know what this is, and so I know how it needs to go and how it needs to play out." Consequently, it appears that the ability to recognize the emotions of others can be developed, although specific conditions forcing the development of this skill may be required.

Challenges in Recognizing the Emotions of Others and Impeded Decision-Making

Emotion recognition ability did not come easily to all deans. Two academic deans struggled with recognizing the emotions of others. James did not want to "read" too much into people's emotions to avoid assumptions. He mentioned that some people were able to maintain "a poker face" without showing their true emotions. For that reason, he preferred to rely on their words instead, especially when facing other's passive-aggressive behavior.

Patricia mentioned the difficulty of recognizing the emotions of others because she, herself, was not an emotional person. She also talked about the challenge of working with passive-aggressive individuals whose words did not match their actions. That is why it was important for Patricia to build strong relationships with her colleagues, so she could recognize their emotions and choose an appropriate communication approach. Patricia shared:

Getting to know the people that you're working with, I think in those relationships is

important so I can read between the lines and recognize when, which way to go, you

know, recognize when something is really important to them but maybe they're not

saying the words. Because, although life is so much easier if they will [sic] just say the

words, you do have people who won't.

Finally, some deans pointed out that recognizing the emotions of others could impede

their decision-making. Stephanie wondered if by "reading" people, she was "taking it to a level

that I don't need to take it to." Both Aida and Jackie mentioned that they did not have time for

other people's emotions and spending time determining other's emotional state slowed down

their decision-making process.

Summary of Emotion Recognition

Overall, the findings showed that most deans were attuned to the emotions of others.

Being able to recognize the emotions of their colleagues by interpreting body language, facial

expressions, tone of voice, and choice of words allowed deans to choose an appropriate

communication strategy. Some deans adjusted their communication approach when they

observed changes in the emotions of others. A few deans mentioned learning emotion

recognition at a young age because of the need to adjust to the changing emotions of their family

members.

A few deans found it difficult to recognize the emotions of others, particularly when

communicating with individuals exhibiting passive-aggressive behavior. Although most deans

believed emotion recognition ability helped them in making decisions, some deans mentioned

the disadvantages of emotion recognition for decision-making. According to them, reading too

much into people's emotions created unnecessary complications for decision-making and slowed

down their decision-making process.

Emotion Self-Awareness

Another emotional intelligence skill that stood out during the data analysis was academic deans' ability to be aware of their own emotions. This ability was not listed among emotional intelligence abilities outlined in the theoretical framework (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019), and presented in these findings as a separate ability because it did not align with any of the theoretical propositions defined in Chapter III. Emotion self-awareness represents deans' ability to be aware of their own emotions by registering their physiological responses, identifying their emotions, as well as understanding the reasons and consequences of their emotions.

Deans' ability to recognize physiological changes in their bodies appeared as an integral part of emotion self-awareness. After recognizing their body reaction, deans could pinpoint a related emotion. For example, Victoria talked about recognizing her body reaction and naming the emotion:

> I will have a physiological response. Sometimes when someone comes in, and they're angry or I'm feeling angry. I'm using anger, but it could be even fear, or it could be frustration, I could be feeling anxious sometimes. I mean there's so much going on, I'm like, oh, my gosh - and I start panicking. So, I think I recognize the physiological response that I'm having. I'm like: Oh, okay, honey, that feels like whatever, anxiety, anger.

Similarly, Stephanie described her body reactions to the news that made her angry: "I'm always getting like this chest tightening kind of feeling. Probably felt flush, like heat." Kathryn pointed out that her body reaction reflected her emotions. "My daughters would tell you that my neck gives everything away. I flush so there's only so much I can do about that," shared Kathryn.

Taking a Break to Process the Information

Self-awareness of one's emotions served as an important signal to deans that a decision or any other action could not be made at that moment and that a pause was needed. For example, Becky talked about having emotional reactions when discussing matters that were her passion. "Sometimes I can hear myself - I talk louder. I get emotional," Becky shared. Once she does, she knows it is time to look for ways to gain control of her emotions. "One thing I had learned a long time ago is when you're in that kind of emotional state and that kind of tension, it is not the best time to fire off an email back," shared Becky when talking about responding to unpleasant emails**.**

In reflecting on the importance of taking a pause, Becky quoted her former college president: "Pause and reflect before you make that big decision." Becky mentioned that "hurrying up" was a natural tendency when making a difficult decision under pressure to "make this go away," but she encouraged all to slow down. "I think you have to sleep on it or not sleep on it because that's really what happens, and you gotta chew on it for a little bit."

Similarly, Lauren also shared that she does not make decisions when her emotions get involved. "If I'm not in a good spot … I'm just like, I'm listening to everything you said but I can't give you a decision right now," noted Lauren. Lauren warned about the danger of rushed decisions made based on emotions. She believed slowing down in decision-making prevented "knee-jerk reactions" and allowed her to envision all steps to the decision. Lauren encouraged others not to feel pressure to answer in the moment when making a decision.

Jackie talked about being aware of the triggers that cause her emotions. "I realize I have certain people that just push my buttons by walking into a room." Jackie's typical reaction to her triggers was to become irritated or angry. However, recognizing her triggers and her emotional

reaction to these triggers helped her distance herself from the situation until her emotions were under control. She talked about email communication when feeling angry or irritated: "I make sure that when I recognize that [emotional reaction], like, I don't just respond and send it."

Patricia talked about having emotional reactions when dealing with issues that mattered to her: "I recognize what those things are, and I just have to kind of force myself to kind of back off a little bit and be more neutral about it." Recognizing her triggers was a first step towards emotion control.

Victoria mentioned that recognizing her emotions indicated to her that she needed time to process the information. "Like I'm angry and I can't do this right now," she said. Victoria also pointed out that her emotion recognition ability came with years of experience. Recognizing her emotions helped Victoria not let them dictate her actions. Victoria shared learning to pause in difficult situations after making the mistake of rushing into decisions in her early days as a dean. "I had a little bit of information, felt anxious about it, felt the pressure to do something about it quickly, and made the wrong decision." Now when she feels under pressure to make a decision, she pauses to acknowledge what is happening: "That pause looks like a breath. A literal pause in whatever I'm doing, and sometimes it's just a deep breath, and you know it's seconds." Taking the pause helps her to transition to the next step of collecting the information.

Aida mentioned that pausing to regulate your emotions may signal others to stop as well and rethink the situation. Although she was still learning to stop conversations when she felt "on the spot," she believed it was the right thing to do. Aida added:

> I'm supposed to make a decision. I'm supposed to say something, but it's okay to stop it. And it's okay to be like - I gotta give that some thought … But also, I think that can be a signal to the other person, that this is not great for me. That maybe, maybe what you're

doing isn't good either … So, without me having to be explicitly like - "Dude, knock it

off," I think that might have been a signal that you need to rethink how we're talking

about this.

Finally, Michael suggested normalizing taking a break to calm the emotions as a part of a

self-care routine. Michael shared: "You just gotta take care of yourself though whether that's

separating or taking a break, or something like that. And I think that's okay." He also suggested

letting go of unhealthy guilt that could come with the need to take a break to prevent it from

negatively affecting one's well-being.

Hence, deans' emotion self-awareness served as an important sign that a decision could

not be made and that emotion regulation was needed. Taking a break/pausing allowed deans to

start processing the information and prevented them from the negative consequences of rushed

decisions. Additionally, pausing was viewed as an important technique that prompted emotional

balance in others.

Emotion Self-Awareness as a Learning Tool

Emotion self-awareness served as a learning tool for academic deans. Specifically, the

ability to recognize and identify one's own emotions pushed academic deans to search for more

information or options until emotion was under control. James pointed out that the ability to

recognize his emotions helped him learn: "So okay, well, I have never experienced this, let me

try to do this. Okay, if I still have another negative [emotion]. Let me try to do something else."

Stephanie pointed out taking a "hard look" at the situation that is affected by an emotion:

"Does my emotion, you know, kind of match that?" The emotion pushed her to look for more

data and collect as much information as she possibly could to allow her to decide. Victoria had a

similar approach: "I think when I acknowledge the emotion I can kind of say, okay, I'm feeling

anxious about this. What is the other information? What else do I know?" For Victoria, the assessment of the emotion set the stage for looking for more information.

Courtney mentioned that emotions were "secondary" to her. "To make a decision, I think about facts first, emotion second." However, after looking at the facts she considered her emotions again: "I try to sit with it and make sure I'm okay with it." This approach allowed her "to be less emotional, and more factual."

Thus, deans' emotion self-awareness assisted them in decision-making. This ability to recognize their emotions pushed some academic deans to search for more information. The emotions pointed to the need to collect more data and learn more about the situation at hand.

Summary of Emotion Self-Awareness

As mentioned above, academic deans' emotion self-awareness signaled to them that making a decision should be postponed until the emotions were under control. Emotion self-awareness allowed deans to identify when a pause was needed; thus, helping them to process information and preventing them from making rushed decisions. It also helped the deans to signal to others the need for emotion regulation. Although not all deans talked about their emotion awareness, those who mentioned this skill differentiated it from various actions taken for emotion control. These deans mentioned physiological changes in their bodies and their ability to notice them before taking any other actions. In some instances, self-awareness of one's own emotions served as a learning tool by pushing deans to search for more information to calm the emotion.

Emotion Regulation

While emotion self-awareness allowed academic deans to register their emotions, emotion regulation helped the deans control those emotional reactions. According to the

theoretical proposition, emotion regulation is defined as the ability to use various cognitive strategies to regulate one's emotions. However, only two academic deans in this study mentioned applying cognitive strategies for emotion regulation. By contrast, non-cognitive strategies appeared as the most widely used by academic deans. Therefore, presented in this section are the strategies that emerged in the data analyses including both cognitive and non-cognitive: physical activity (walking, breathing, exercising), venting to others, and emotional reappraisal.

Breathing and Physical Activity

Breathing and physical activity helped academic deans control their emotions and remove their emotions from decision-making. Patricia mentioned that physical activity helped to bring down her anxiety level. "[Physical activity] helps me become a little more level-headed, but again trying to take the emotion out of the decision-making."

When Lauren feels her emotions taking over her, she takes a few laps around the building. "They call me the *walking dean*," she said. Walking helps Lauren to prevent her emotions from being involved in her decision-making.

Nicole also practiced taking a pause, deep breathing, and physical activity to regulate her emotions. She also pointed out that emotions at work would make her feel exhausted. "I feel like I just have my leftovers left, you know, for my family." Taking a nap or simply laying in her car with her eyes closed during the lunch break helped her to reset and feel refreshed.

Similarly, Kathryn talked about using meditation and physical activity for emotion regulation. "I will physically go through a calming of myself." Kathryn takes herself out of a difficult moment by setting boundaries and taking a break. "And again, never give a response in the moment, never," added Kathryn. Therefore, physical activity and breathing appeared as important emotion regulation techniques that assisted academic deans in making conscious

decisions.

Venting

Most deans mentioned venting as another emotion regulation technique. Deans chose to vent with people whom they could trust, such as family members or close friends, who did not know the people involved in the decision-making process. In most cases, venting was not used as a brain-storming tool or a way to find a solution to a problem, but rather as a way to reduce stress. Three deans mentioned feeling comfortable venting to selected colleagues. For example, Nicole felt grateful for having a "safe place" with her colleagues. She shared: "We can just talk very openly with each other. We're very frank and even tell each other hard truths if we need to hear it." However, one dean felt venting to colleagues was "unprofessional." Hence, venting also helped academic deans in information processing.

Emotional Reappraisal

Finally, being able to change thought patterns and think positively also helped deans to regulate their emotions. Aida mentioned that she tends to "jump to conclusions" - "This is wrong, and here's who did it!" Knowing this tendency, she reminds herself to focus on positive thinking and change her framing. Aida explained:

> Maybe they didn't do it, right? Maybe they weren't thinking about it at all. That's just a decision that was made. Nobody was trying to get anybody ... Maybe the problem is - nobody thought it through, right? … You can't have this like us against them attitude about everything because that's not helpful.

Michael talked about using a "let's see how it works out" versus "that's not gonna work out" attitude when faced with decisions that he did not support. "Let's let it play out, you know that's kind of part of what I probably tell myself. Let this play out a little bit, see what

happens." Thus, emotional reappraisal allowed both of them to regulate their emotions and look at a challenging situation from a different perspective.

Need for Emotion Regulation

Deans talked about the importance of emotional regulation for leadership in general and effective decision-making in particular. Lauren believed emotion regulation was vital for the deans' job longevity. She mentioned that controlling emotions and maintaining professionalism in communication helped leaders to avoid burnout. "I think you're not gonna make it more than three years as a leader [without emotion regulation] because it's hard enough to do it, particularly during the pandemic and post-pandemic," she added.

Becky echoed Lauren's opinion. She believed that emotion regulation was crucial not only for stress control but for effective decision-making as well. Becky pointed out:

> If you were just letting your emotions run over, and you're not seeing, you're not hearing. You're just blown up in here, and you want your way, and no other way will do. I think if you don't gain control of that as a leader, you're always going to be very stressed and you're not gonna hear and interact with all the parts that you really need to make a good decision.

Victoria talked about the importance of emotional regulation for assisting others. The need for emotion regulation became particularly apparent to her during the Covid-19 pandemic when "faculty were in crisis" and "there were big decisions." "There were days that felt really heavy. So, I thought - I'm going to have to get myself together to be able to help other people." Thus, deans viewed emotion regulation as an integral part of strong leadership, effective decision-making, and stress control.

"We Can't Just Be Going Off Saying What We Want to Say." Deans experienced a

broad range of emotions when performing their professional duties; however, among the most mentioned were frustration, anger, anxiety, and guilt. Some academic deans believed that the nature of their leadership positions did not allow them to show these and other emotions freely. "We can't just be going off saying what we want to say … We have to be able to control our emotions," said Michael. Aida shared that controlling her emotions was paramount for keeping a difficult situation under control. She talked about the danger of communicating with people who tried to elicit emotional reactions in others for their benefit. Aida mentioned:

> Those people tend to only operate in motion, and they do it on purpose in order to go to you or provoke you into also operating that way. And so, once you figure that out, then you gotta take ten steps back and realize, like, that you have to do this as neutrally as possible … because otherwise, you fall into the danger of being just as emotional as they are, which is exactly what they want, right?

Kathryn mentioned not showing emotions to avoid misleading people: "I never make any promises to anybody. I try not even to, you know, react much." Kathryn often takes notes, even if only for physical distraction, to avoid giving emotional reactions and misleading people about what she may or may not be thinking. James also worried about misleading people with his reactions. He mentioned that even small acts of kindness, such as offering a tissue, could influence people's perceptions and make them believe that he was agreeing with them or supporting them. This result highlights that deans needed emotion regulation to stay composed, keep issues under control, and avoid misleading others.

Race, Gender, and Emotion Regulation. Gender and race also seemed to play a role in the deans' emotion regulation. Several female deans felt the need to control their emotions to avoid being perceived as emotional or weak. Lauren pointed out that she tends to "lead with her

heart" which she thought was partially due to the nature of her gender and partially due to her personality. Full of compassion and care for others, Lauren loves coaching and mentoring people. She thought that on the one hand, it helped her in decision-making; however, on the other hand, she felt like an "outlier." "I think that [compassion and care] helps in the decision-making process, it just sometimes, you know, a heart decision isn't always what many other leaders would think is the right decision."

Becky talked about learning to make her point in a less passionate and more focused manner, so she does not come across as a "crazy lady." Aida, a black female, described herself as an "easily excitable person." Like Becky, when she feels strongly about a particular problem, she has to "temper" her emotional reaction to avoid being perceived as "hysterical." She added:

When my colleague said the same thing - he's not overreacting, so why am I overreacting, right? And I didn't, I swear I didn't like get in anybody's face. I just said what I thought was true, and all of a sudden that is problematic.

James, a black male, also talked about the need to control his emotions. As a male, he felt like he could not express "strong" emotions, for example, sadness through crying to avoid being perceived as weak. As a black male, he had to be careful in expressing anger, especially with people who may not know him, to avoid being viewed as an "angry black male" or "aggressive." "If people look at me, they see skin tone, they see that I'm male … so I don't necessarily have the … flexibility to be super emotional." He pointed out that he often feels the need to appear gentler when communicating with people. This suggests that academic deans' gender and race perceptions guided them in what they believed was acceptable emotion expression behavior.

"Too Cold"

Although deans viewed emotional regulation as an important component of their job,

some of them worried that the constant need to suppress their emotions and keep them out of

decision-making made them appear as "too cold" or "not caring." "I think we can make decisions

but, you know, sometimes you kind of get robotic with it, and don't think about the human side

of things," said Michael. Courtney mentioned that being non-emotional makes her "great" in

making decisions. "I'm able to be very non-emotional when making decisions. I am able to be

that person who tells students really horrible news." However, Courtney also needs to make sure

she does not appear cold or "shut down" - "I have to check in and remind myself - other people

are not like me … And so, you need to add a layer of warmth here to make sure people feel taken

care of." Courtney mentioned that she often asks for help with "the human component" from her

colleague who is "a big squishy emotional person." "We talk about it intentionally. I will say,

look, I need to run something by you because you're going to add the human component in."

Similarly, James also mentioned that he tries to avoid showing emotions by "having a

poker face" or "a face that doesn't necessarily show if you're happy or sad and so on." Yet, he

learned that having a poker face may signal to others that he does not care, so he also has to

balance emotion suppression with the human aspect.

Jackie talked about setting boundaries with her coworkers and not discussing or inquiring

about any personal matters so this knowledge could not affect her decision-making. Jackie

explained: "I know a lot of people are very big on - How are you doing? How's your mom? And

I don't do that. I purposely don't do that because I don't want to cross those

boundaries." However, Jackie worried about coming across as "harsh" and believed that using

such an approach could be a weakness of hers. Therefore, the findings showed that academic

deans struggled to balance emotion regulation with showing enough emotion, so others felt

supported.

Improving Emotion Regulation is a Conscious Choice

Academic deans believed that they were able to improve their emotion regulation with experience. Becky described how she tended to let her passion "overexert" in the past. With years she learned to control her emotions. She no longer lets her emotions overwhelm her by taking the time to listen to all involved. Developing emotion regulation ability helped Becky learn to be more succinct in her communication and target only specific issues that are truly important to her. Becky explained:

> There are some things that you go - "You know what, if you use that word there instead of the word I suggested, let it be so. It is all right. It's not gonna be the end of the world." Whereas ten years ago - "Don't use that word!" … That passion was overly done, and it was obnoxious at times.

Nicole mentioned learning from the times she was not able to control her emotions. She remembered when she first started working as a dean and had two new administrative assistants working in the office with her: "We all cried so much that first year!" Now, looking back she laughs at herself. Nicole shared:

> I've definitely learned from, you know, along the way. To, you know, just to remain calm and try, you know, try to not let your emotions come into play at all. They might come into play later on when you're processing, but in the moment, you just keep it together, because if you stay calm and collective, then everybody else typically will as well.

Kathryn also reflected on the development of her emotion regulation. She remembered having a "terrible temper" when she was 25. "I thought I was right, and I had a temper, and I would cut people through the quick and hurt people's feelings, and … not have a lot of remorse for it at the time." Yet, over the years Kathryn changed the way she looked at her interactions

with other people and worked on being patient.

Five deans shared that learning to regulate emotions was their conscious choice. For example, Becky mentioned making a mindful choice to temper her reactions. She remembered that within a couple of years of leadership, the need to control her emotions became apparent, particularly when she started noticing other leaders who lacked that ability. Becky shared:

> I learned from watching it that I didn't like it. And that I didn't wanna be like that. And so, I think that helped me make a psychological break with - Becky, you don't come across like that. That's not who you wanna be as a leader.

Victoria also shared being intentional in learning emotion regulation. She started reading books about wellbeing, doing self-reflection, and setting boundaries. As mentioned above, developing emotion regulation ability allowed her to better respond to the needs of others.

Summary of Emotion Regulation

In summary, the academic deans described using breathing, engaging in physical activity, venting, and emotion reappraisal as emotion regulation techniques. In making decisions, applying emotion regulation techniques allowed academic deans to remove emotions from decision-making and make conscious decisions. Deans viewed emotion regulation as a skill vital for successful leadership and effective decision-making. Deans used emotion regulation to reduce stress, assist others, keep difficult situations under control, and avoid misleading people. Some deans felt the need to control their emotions to avoid negative race and gender stereotyping. Although deans believed that overall emotion regulation was essential for their roles, some of them worried that the need to control emotions all the time made them appear cold-hearted to their colleagues. As a result, deans mentioned the need to balance emotion regulation with emotion expression to ensure others felt they cared.

Academic deans noted improvements in emotion regulation with experience. For some deans developing emotion regulations was a mindful choice. These deans made a conscious effort to learn to control their emotions. They reflected on their mistakes, searched for educational resources on emotion regulation, and learned to monitor and address their emotional reactions.

Emotion Understanding

Understanding the emotions of other people appeared as another emotional intelligence skill important for the academic deans' decision-making. Eight academic deans mentioned understanding why people expressed certain emotions in difficult situations or taking the time to understand them. In some instances, deans could understand the emotions of others without getting emotionally involved. In these cases, deans' emotion understanding prevented them from being offended or upset by the words and actions of people who were experiencing strong emotions. Understanding the emotions of others also allowed them to predict people's emotional responses in various situations, and adequately prepare for these responses. However, in many other instances, academic deans' emotion understanding was much deeper leading them to imagine themselves going through other people's experiences. The empathy they felt in those situations grew into compassion compelling them to actively search for fair solutions that would help all involved.

Not Taking Things Personally: "I know It's Not About Me, It's About the Problem"

Five academic deans mentioned that emotion understanding prevented them from taking personally and responding to other people's emotional reactions. For example, Lauren noted not taking offense when someone was "lashing back" at her. She explained: "I've just given them some very bad news, so it's okay for them to lash out at me. I know it's not about me, it's about

the problem."

Similarly, Stephanie described understanding why her subordinate felt ambushed and angry when her unsatisfying performance was brought up. "She definitely was defensive during that, which, you know, I get. She's trying to defend her job, so I'm sure she was feeling like, you know, she needed to defend herself." Stephanie also noted that when the reason for an individual's emotional reaction is not clear, she takes the time "to get the why" of the emotion by talking about what is overwhelming the person: "Again it's that sort of - let's sit down and talk about what's, you know, what's going on here?"

Patricia also used emotion understanding to avoid taking her supervisor's emotional reactions personally. Patricia could tell that her supervisor had a difficult time working as the only female of a male executive leadership team and could not always manage her subordinates the way she wanted. Patricia shared:

It's hard [for the supervisor] because she is getting it on her end from the President …

My boss is a female. She has not said this to me, but I have perceived in my interactions

with the two of them that the president, she's the only female of a male executive

leadership team, and our president is a guys' guy ... And so, I think she just kind of got

her hands tied a little bit, because she really can't stand up to him because he's angry, and

so she's got to take the fault for that.

Nicole believed that people's emotions indicated that they were invested in and cared about the situation. She talked about the emotional reaction of one of her faculty members when he realized a tutor supported the student in accusing him of not giving a fair grade on a paper. Nicole described that moment as the most challenging one in her decision-making situation:

Definitely the peak of the challenge there, I think, was when Scott [faculty member] was

in my office, and I read Ian's [tutor; the name has been changed] letter back on the phone with him in here. And him being just so upset over it because, I mean, I am now realizing - hey, this is the first time he's hearing this. And I'm reading it out loud to another colleague while he's in the room, and it's about him, you know.

Nicole could understand the faculty's feelings of "being attacked." "I wasn't infuriated, but it was just like, I felt like, man, I wish he didn't feel that way, but I understand why he does." Although she was able "to stay neutral" and look at the situation without letting her own emotions be involved, Nicole wished she knew it was the faculty's first time hearing the tutor's accusations so she could have handled it better.

Similarly, Victoria could understand why a faculty member was emotional after Victoria presented her with documentation of her unsatisfactory performance. Victoria described why the faculty member felt the way she felt: "My feeling or my read of the situation is that she had been a very successful professional, and this was embarrassing." Victoria added that the individual was emotional also because the faculty's shortcomings were now formally documented. "Probably she felt some shame that she was struggling, and it being documented and noted, and then discussed in such a formal way."

Therefore, emotion understanding prevented participants from letting the emotions of others drive their actions and behavior. Deans were able to stay calm and composed because they could understand the reasons for people's emotions. Thus, emotion understanding helped academic deans to respond to people's emotions and difficult situations involving others more effectively.

Predicting People's Reactions

Emotion understanding ability also allowed academic deans to predict people's reactions;

hence, helping them to prepare appropriately for various situations. For instance, Kathryn shared:

"I do see myself very able to predict the way people are going to respond, and so that helps me

be prepared with reasons that I'm making the decisions with alternatives." Jackie expressed a

similar idea. The ability to predict the emotional reactions of others allowed her to plan and

prepare individuals to willingly accept or support her agenda. Jackie explained:

> Because I kinda know how people in my department react … I start leading up to things
>
> … I look at it as I take away their excuses … That way it's not a shock when we sit down
>
> and have that conversation, you know. Part of it is I'm trying to get them to buy in …
>
> Because I have found that anytime you kind of talk to them, they close down, they just
>
> shut down. So, I'm trying not to do that. I want them to have a say instead of - "Well,
>
> they're making me," but I also know that that's what their excuse is gonna be.

Similarly, Stephanie talked about the ability to predict people's emotional responses.

"Sometimes I know that something is going to frustrate somebody," she noted when talking

about the emotions of others. Victoria also shared: "I think it probably helps that I can predict

like people feel this way." Both could then use appropriate emotion management techniques to

address people's emotions.

Empathy and Fairness

Empathy appeared as another important aspect of emotion understanding. Being able to

empathize with others when making decisions often made academic deans feel compassion.

Consequently, the desire to help forced academic deans to search for solutions that would

alleviate the concerns of others and would be fair for all involved.

When Kathryn talked about the role of emotions in decision-making she said: "My

emotions I hope make me empathetic to what people are going through and trying to be fair."

Lauren mentioned empathizing with people's emotions and having the ability to imagine what they might be feeling at those moments. "I can empathize with the situation, and I try and put myself in that situation, particularly, like if it's a tough decision to make."

Becky, who perceived herself as having an ability to "pick up where people are," also mentioned the link between empathy and fairness. Having empathy for a faculty member who refused to get vaccinated during the Covid-19 pandemic, pushed Becky to look for a solution that would allow others with the same beliefs to continue participating in clinicals. Although initially she was against allowing unvaccinated students to participate in clinicals, having a conversation with a faculty made a difference in her decision. Becky shared:

> I did have enough empathy to say: "I get this. I understand why you have an issue. You can't go to clinical" ... We had to make an accommodation for them ... And then it really got interesting, because if I do it for you as an employee, I have to do it for this student.

When Michael had to address a discrimination case described earlier, understanding the emotions of all involved helped him in making a fair decision and resolving the issue. He took time to listen and understand the emotions of all stakeholders - the students who "were being fed untruths" about the instructor, "the disgruntled employee who did not get the instructor's job," and "the one instructor who was being discriminated against." The empathy that Michael felt helped him to manage each stakeholder. When describing his conversation with a discriminated faculty member, Michael shared:

> In this situation, you know, kind of those thoughts and feelings came up too, because I understood what this other faculty was feeling in this pool of being by himself, you know. So that wasn't necessarily why, I made sure to advocate, he was being treated unfairly and unjust [sic]. So that was my reason for doing it. But I knew what he felt

being by himself, you know ... These are industrial programs, so you know, these guys,

they're together. They have long contact hours, so they may order lunch. And he was

just, they didn't even talk to him. I mean it. It was that type of environment that they

were creating out here.

At the same time, Michael could understand why a part-time faculty member who

instigated the students' complaints felt the way he felt. After hearing the part-time instructor's

story, Michael learned that the part-time faculty had been promised the full-time position that

was offered to another person (the instructor who later became the object of discrimination).

With empathy, Michael was able to build a meaningful connection with the part-time instructor

to change his perceptions about a fellow instructor. Thus, empathy assisted Michael with making

a fair decision.

Victoria voiced that having empathy for others was an important aspect of her decision-

making. She believed that her empathy building took place when she was a child through her

love for reading, her family, and the environment in which she grew up. For Victoria, having

emotional intelligence when making decisions meant "being able to step out of myself for a

minute and have empathy for what's happening with someone else or how what I might do will

impact someone else." As she was reflecting on empathy, Victoria pointed out that in her opinion

empathy developed over time and through experience, and she was grateful for going through

life experiences that taught her this skill: "I don't think it's just you sit in a workshop and make

someone empathetic, but I think I kinda got lucky in that way."

Summary of Emotion Understanding

In general, emotion understanding played an important role in the participants' decision-

making. Emotion understanding allowed academic deans not to take people's emotional

reactions personally, providing them with the ability to focus on problem-solving. Emotion understanding also served as an important tool for predicting people's emotional reactions, allowing deans to prepare for advocating their decisions to others. Finally, being able to empathize with the emotions of others prompted academic deans to search for solutions that would be fair for all involved.

Emotion Management

The ability to understand the emotions of others led to another important emotional intelligence skill - emotion management. Once deans could understand why people showed certain emotions, they could take action to manage the emotions of other people. While the approaches to emotion management varied depending on the situation, managing the emotions of others allowed academic deans to accomplish three tasks related to effective decision-making: (a) progressing from emotional turmoil to the brainstorming stage of the decision-making progress, (b) encouraging others to offer possible solutions in a challenging situation, (c) shifting people's perspectives so the best decision could be made.

Progressing To the Brainstorming Stage of Decision-Making

Academic deans realized that reasoning with individuals affected by strong emotions was unproductive. Therefore, deans used a variety of techniques to calm the emotions of others, so they could progress to the brainstorming stage of the decision-making process quicker. These techniques included listening actively and providing others with time and a safe space to express their emotions, acknowledging and validating the emotions of others, staying friendly and using humor to diffuse a challenging situation, helping to lighten the burdens of others, and even taking the blame on oneself.

"I Listen. I Just Sit and Listen and Let Them Get It out." The most mentioned

approach that academic deans used to manage the emotions of other people was active listening.

Deans took time to let people talk while listening attentively to show others they cared. They

asked questions and reiterated what people told them to ensure others knew deans were listening.

"I understand this is difficult, you know, and to try to let the person know that you still care. You

care about them, and you know they're important," said Michael. Aida mentioned that often

letting a person express their emotions is the only thing she needed to do to manage their

emotions:

> I have found that 98% of the time you didn't come in here to tell me about it because you
>
> wanted me to solve it, you just wanted to tell me. And I have found that if you just like,
>
> give everybody space to tell you whatever it is, people, most likely, wrap it up
>
> themselves, and then they're like - "Thanks for your help." And I'm like - "You're
>
> welcome." It's just because you don't have anybody that heard you or will listen to you,
>
> so I just have to do that.

One of the essential aspects of active listening was listening without offering solutions.

Often academic deans simply needed to provide a safe place for others to express their emotions,

so people knew they were heard. Phrases like "I let them get it out," "I let them go," "I let them

vent," and "I have to take it" were often used by academic deans to describe this approach.

For example, Nicole shared: "I listen. I just sit and listen and let them get it out, and I

want them to know that it's, this is a safe space, you know. It's a confidential space … So, I just

stop and listen." Similarly, Becky noted: "You gotta let them get it out … so you can unloosen

that rubber band a little bit; otherwise, you are just gonna get it more and more tight." Becky

added that she often must wait her turn to do "some reasoning" because trying to reason with a

person full of emotion could make things even worse. Victoria pointed out the importance of

letting people talk and not feeling forced to "fill in the quiet." She shared that often when she feels nervous, she fills the space with talking, but she is working on waiting and giving the person an opportunity to speak. In sum, listening actively allowed academic deans to manage the emotions of others by making people feel heard.

"No Matter What the Emotion May Be, I Usually Try to Acknowledge It." Deans also talked about the need to acknowledge and validate the emotions of other people while listening to them. Victoria pointed out that she always tries to acknowledge the emotions of other people no matter what they are. Victoria describes her approach:

> The language that I use really may depend on who the person is and what the emotion is. So, it's like if they seem really angry, I might not say: "Gosh! You seem really angry about something stupid." I'm not gonna say that, but it might be: "Gosh! It sounds like you're really upset about it. Does this seem right?" And then sometimes I'm just kind of firm with them, like "It seems to me you're really upset. Does that seem right to you?"

Victoria noted that acknowledging the emotions of others was very helpful because it often allowed her to calm down the intense emotions of others. Similarly, Nicole always tries to validate the emotions of others "no matter how misdirected they may be." She might say: "I'm so sorry this upset you … Let's talk about it." Over the years, Nicole learned that some people needed more validation than others. Aida pointed out that often she had to remind herself to let others feel their feelings:

> I also know that I have to step back and remember that lots of times this is an experience that I have been through hundreds of times, and this is the first time that *you* [emphasis added] are coming to me with it … It's all brand new for you, and also this is your life, and it's very important to you.

Providing a safe place for others to express their emotions, as well as acknowledging and validating their emotions, helped academic deans to calm the emotions of others faster. Aida pointed out that often people do not want to deal with the emotions of others. "We want people to get over it." However, allowing people to express their emotions served her well when making decisions. Aida noted: "I think once you allow people to say whatever it is that they want to say, then you can move on and be constructive about whatever it is." She also added: "If I allow that, then we can get to the end faster."

Overall, emotion validation and acknowledgment also allowed academic deans to manage the emotions of other people. Together with providing a safe place for others to express their emotions, emotion validation and acknowledgment assisted deans with returning all involved in an emotionally charged situation to a neutral range faster. This approach helped to progress to the problem-solving stage of the decision-making process quicker.

"If It Puts a Smile on Your Face, Then It's Helping Calm Their Emotions." Staying friendly and using humor also helped deans to manage the emotions of others. Jackie noted: "You kind of have to laugh at things sometimes." When mentioning humor, she described a situation in which a parent called one of her part-time faculty members "a devil-worshiping sex trafficker" because of the article he used in one of his classes. The instructor found it very offensive, and Jackie had to "talk him off the ledge." "What I told him was you just kinda have to laugh about it, you know," Jackie remembered.

Becky viewed a sense of humor as "the most important coping mechanism" and as "one of the greatest things that a leader can bring." She mentioned using humor to a great extent to manage the emotions of her team. Becky shared:

From the moment they come in here when they're stressed, I try to make them at ease. I

try to, you know, decompress the frustration, and that, you know, what's going on with them, and you know I try to be a good listener, but it's really about letting some air out of the tire and letting that emotion that they have deflate. And I'm very fortunate, and that's one of the reasons I won't move from here, is that I have a crew that has a great sense of humor … We always have some fun, every year along the way, and it's little things. It's not big things [sic] that you do. It's little things that you do or that you say. You know, when I see somebody in the hall, I don't ever not speak. It's always usually some kind of wisecrack or this or that to just put people at ease.

Nicole noted that appearing friendly and using humor helped her to resolve very tough situations "painlessly." Laughing, she remembered addressing several "crazy things you would never think you would deal with." Such as a student's complaint about an instructor "snorting cocaine in their office," resolving a conflict between a cleaning crew and a faculty member whose dog kept on defecating in his lab without him realizing it and addressing student dissatisfaction with "a naked faculty member taking a shower" in the veterinary technician students' bathroom. When dealing with one of these situations, an instructor told her: "Man, they have you do everything, don't they?" "Yeah, pretty much," responded Nicole. However, approaching these tasks with a sense of humor not only allowed her to overcome the awkwardness of the situations but also helped her to create a positive bond with the people involved.

"It's Easier Sometimes … to Smooth It out to Say - Hey, You Know, I'm Sorry That I Did This." Sometimes it was easier for deans to take the blame or burden of some responsibilities on themselves to calm the emotions of others. Patricia referred to herself as a "pleaser" who often manages the emotions of others by trying to make them happy even if

making herself "the fault guy." "What is it that is gonna make them happy in this outcome? And even if it means to my own detriment."

Nicole echoed Patricia's opinion. According to her, taking the blame on herself allowed her to keep the situation from "getting out of control." Nicole explained:

> You know, I just, a lot of times take it on yourself, you know. Like: "Hey, I'm sorry how that came across, and that's not what I was intending to mean." So, it's kind of going back and just knowing that it's easier sometimes just to, you know, I don't wanna say: "throw yourself under the bus," but it's easier sometimes, you know, to smooth it out to say: "Hey, you know I'm sorry that I did this because, you know, it has exploded into something else, you know. And that's not what I meant at all."

Similarly, Becky was willing to "put a little extra work" on herself to "take the pressure out of somebody's tire." "I did ask a lot, what can I do to help you? What can I do to make this better? … Let's see what we can do immediately to try to take some of the pressure off," was Becky's approach during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. She intentionally looked for small things she could do to alleviate her faculty's burdens whether it was talking to a group of agitated students, responding to an email, or stopping by a classroom. "And that's really a small price for me to pay to help that employee get that little bit of pressure off." Hence, taking the blame or helping to ease the burden of people's responsibilities served as important emotion management techniques that also helped to progress to the brainstorming stage of the decision-making.

Encouraging Others to Offer Solutions: "What Do You Hope to Happen After This?"

Another common emotion management technique academic deans used included asking others about the desired outcome or goal of communication when emotions were involved.

James has a habit of asking people about what they hoped to get out of the situation that provoked their emotions. "What do you hope to happen after this?" James would ask. Stephanie always tried to clarify if people simply wanted to talk about a situation or if they wanted a solution. Stephanie reiterated: "Again working on trying to really listen first before I start offering solutions and seeing kind of what they want … what kind of support they want from me."

Patricia pointed out that when people knew the desired outcome, she would try to address it by offering suggestions on how it can be achieved. However, she noticed that often people could not describe what they wanted but being asked about the desired outcome helped to calm their emotions. Patricia explained:

> In some instances, they can define it [desired outcome], and in a lot of instances they can't … I'm like - … "Think about it. And if you think of something that I can do to help you, or if you think of something that we can do as a team, then let's come back and revisit." Most of the time, it just kind of goes away, it's more of that - "I need to vent, and just the need to be heard."

Asking people to voice their desired outcomes helped deans to involve others in the decision-making process. Nicole mentioned that she tends to ask: "If you had a magic wand, and I could fix this for you, what would that look like? What would you have me do?" Thus, inquiring about desired outcomes helped Nicole and other deans encourage others to take part in decision-making and offer solutions.

Shifting People's Perspectives

Managing the emotions of others also included using techniques that helped to shift people's perspectives. Deans mentioned taking the time to explain the reasons behind certain

actions and decisions, stopping the conversation to give others time to calm down and think, and circling back around. Managing people's emotions using these techniques helped people to see a challenging situation from a different perspective and accept a solution they were not willing to consider before.

"The Decisions Can be Less Emotional if You Can Explain What's Happening." Academic deans also talked about the importance of explaining why certain decisions were made or why specific actions were taken. Deans believed that being transparent when explaining "the why" allowed them to manage the emotions of others in very uncomfortable situations by shifting people's perspectives about a challenging situation. Lauren pointed out the need for clarity and transparency in communication. "The decisions can be less emotional if you can explain what's happening." Nicole mentioned that being transparent to all sides of a conflict helped to eliminate unnecessary doubts and helped everyone see the full picture.

"I'll Be Here for You When You're Ready to Talk to Me." Stopping the conversations when the emotions of other people became uncontrollable and encouraging others to calm down also helped academic deans shift people's perspectives. In some instances, deans had to suggest that others take a break, get exercise, or breathe. Lauren described how she managed the sadness and anger of others:

> If they're sad I usually say: "You know, let's take a few deep breaths." If they're angry, I say: "I'm here for you. I'm happy to talk to you, but please take two laps around the building and come back to me when you've calmed, when you are able to be calm just because nothing happens when you're that emotional. So, I pretty much stop whatever the process is in a very nice and caring way and say: "I'll be here for you when you're ready to talk to me," but we really have to bring the situation down to a certain level, and

I do the same with me.

Similarly, Victoria pointed out inviting others to convene at a different time if she noticed an individual expressing strong emotions. "I would say - Would you like to come back and talk about this later?" She would also give others time to think if she perceived another person as emotional and overwhelmed.

"Hey, This Really Wasn't as Big a Deal as We Thought It Was." Becky warned about deciding when the emotions of others are "heightened." She explained: "Those emotions really influence people's behavior a lot, and it influences their perception of what happened, and what they're saying, and how they're relating it to you." Becky suggested listening and "circling back around" while waiting for the emotional turmoil of others to settle. "I call it circling back around. Circling back around on this - "Tell me again," and you'll see it's a little bit of a different story. It's a little bit of a different twist." The result of circling back often was a changed perspective of the people involved:

> You know, they'll say ... "Well, maybe it wasn't quite what I presented yesterday or earlier today, now that I've looked at it." … Hey, this really wasn't as big a deal as we thought it was by the time we get to the bottom. But you've gotta have the capability to kinda stop that train while it's in motion and coming at you. And say – "Whoa! Wait a minute! Let's process this, let's deal with it," and, you know, try to make a good decision.

Thus, circling back along with explaining "the why" of the situation and encouraging others to take control of their emotions helped academic deans to manage the emotions of others by shifting people's perspectives. Seeing a challenging situation from a new point of view helped others to regain control of their emotions and offer new solutions to a problem. In some

instances, a changed perspective of others neutralized the problem.

Summary of Emotion Management

Overall, academic deans used a variety of techniques to manage the emotions of others. Deans mentioned listening actively and allowing others to express their emotions, acknowledging and validating people's emotions, using humor, staying positive, and taking the blame and extra work on themselves. These emotion management approaches allowed deans to progress towards group problem-solving quicker to start considering various solutions to an emerging problem. Emotions management also helped deans to engage others in offering solutions to a difficult decision-making situation by inquiring about people's desired outcomes and goals. Finally, managing the emotions of others assisted deans in decision-making by shifting people's perspectives and guiding all to a reasonable solution. Dean managed to change the perspectives of others by explaining the causes and reasons for decisions and actions, providing others with an opportunity to regain control of their emotions through breaks, physical activity, and breathing, and revisiting a challenging situation with the involved people.

Summary of Key Findings

The findings related to the first questions showed that due to the nature of their mid-level positions academic deans faced four types of difficult decisions: (a) decisions that may have a negative impact on individuals involved in a decision-making situation, (b) decisions that challenge deans' personal integrity, (c) decisions that may damage relationships and trust with colleagues, and (d) decisions that may be misinterpreted by colleagues. These difficult decisions involved an ethical aspect and required academic deans to make a choice between conflicting values causing emotional turmoil. Additional results also revealed that self-doubt and lack of confidence were common when academic deans faced challenging decision-making situations.

However, going through these challenging experiences increased deans' confidence both in decision-making and leadership.

The findings related to the second question revealed five emotional intelligence skills manifested in deans' decision-making: (a) emotion recognition, (b) emotion self-awareness, (c) emotion control, (d) emotion understanding, and (d) emotion management. The ability to recognize the emotions of others is a skill that some deans learned in childhood. In some instances, recognizing the emotions of others guided academic deans' decision-making by allowing them to select an appropriate communication strategy. However, for some deans, reading people's emotions resulted in impeded decision-making.

The ability to recognize their own emotions or emotion self-awareness helped academic deans in decision-making by signaling them to distance themselves from deciding when strong emotions were experienced; thus, preventing them from rushed decisions. Emotion self-awareness also served as a learning tool for deans, encouraging them to look for more information and appearing as a signal to others to stop and rethink the situation. The ability to regulate one's own emotions seemed to be closely related to emotion self-awareness and helped academic deans to make conscious decisions. Deans used breathing, physical activity, venting, and emotion reappraisal to regulate their emotions.

The ability to understand the emotions of others served as an important step toward being able to manage those emotions. Emotion understanding and empathy prevented academic deans from taking things personally, prompted them to search for a fair solution for all, and helped in predicting people's emotional reactions; thus, guiding decision-making. Finally, the ability to manage the emotions of others helped deans in decision-making by allowing progress toward group problem-solving, engaging others in search of solutions, and shifting people's

perspectives.

In the following chapter, I will present the conclusions of my study. I will discuss the findings related to the literature and unexpected findings, as well as implications for scholars and practitioners. Recommendations for future research will be presented at the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I present the conclusions drawn from the findings reported in the previous chapter. I also provide a discussion of implications for scholars and the profession. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and practice.

Summary of the Study

Community college academic deans play unique and critical roles in their institutions. Serving as a bridge between senior administration and faculty, staff, and students these leaders are responsible for multiple aspects of the organizational environment – from resolving operational issues to implementing strategic priorities of the institution (García et al., 2020; McNair & Perry, 2020; Nguyen, 2014; Rentsch, 2018; Yamamura, 2018). The nature of their mid-level positions often requires deans to address the competing needs of multiple stakeholders, impacting deans' decision-making. Making decisions in such a multifaceted environment can be very challenging due to the complexity of risks and benefits associated with each decision (Boggs & McPhail, 2020).

Although leaders at all levels are continuously encouraged to make data-driven decisions (DeJear, 2016; Monaghan, 2017), using data to inform one's decision in a situation with no obvious right choice may still be insufficient. Such a decision will most likely be impacted by feelings, emotions, intuition, social and cultural influences, and situational pressures (Haidt, 2001; Robinson & Donald, 2015; Soltes, 2017). The research on community college leaders has addressed various aspects of their decision-making (Boggs & McPhail, 2020; Garza Mitchell, 2012; Gonzales, 2019; Hornak & Garza Mitchell, 2016; Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Smith & Fox, 2019); nevertheless, little is known about challenges academic deans encounter when faced with

such difficult decisions and how they manage to balance their emotions with other information available to them.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the ways highly emotionally intelligent community college academic deans draw on emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions. The central research questions were as follows:

1. What difficult decisions do community college academic deans face in their professional roles?

2. How do highly emotionally intelligent academic deans employ emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions?

Summary of the Methodology

To explore the ways in which community college academic deans draw on emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions I used a qualitative multiple-case study approach. Each academic dean represented an individual case. The modified version of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso (2016) four-branch model of ability emotional intelligence was used to understand the manifestation of emotional intelligence in deans' decision-making (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). According to the model, emotional intelligence in this study is conceptualized as a set of four correlated abilities: (a) emotion recognition, (b) emotion understanding, (c) emotion regulation in oneself, and (d) emotion management.

Data Collection

To explore the manifestation of emotional intelligence in the academic deans' decision-making, I conducted interviews with highly emotionally intelligent community college academic deans. These interviews served as the primary source of data for this study. The data collected

through interviews were triangulated with field notes that captured contextual information.

Study participants represented two southeastern states and ten community colleges. A purposeful, intensity sampling technique was used to select the participants with a high level of emotional intelligence. The participants' level of emotional intelligence was determined by the Geneva Emotional Competence Test (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Data collection took place from October of 2022 to April of 2023.

To collect the data, I conducted two in-depth semi-structured interviews with each of the twelve participants, resulting in a total of 24 interviews. I also created descriptive and reflective field notes for all interviews. Descriptive field notes captured descriptions of the participants, their reactions, and my interactions with them. In reflective notes, I recorded my thoughts, feelings, and reflections before and after each interview. The data collected through field notes provided a record of observed activities, allowed me to engage in reflection, and ensured a complete understanding of the research setting and the phenomenon.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study occurred simultaneously with data collection. The data were analyzed in two phases: within-case and cross-case analysis. The within-case analysis included applying initial coding as a first-cycle coding. After assigning initial codes, I organized and categorized data into tentative themes. With each new case, I reorganized and refined the categories until I reached saturation. During the cross-case analysis, I continued examining all cases for cross-case patterns until I could reach cross-case conclusions.

<div align="center">

Summary of Major Findings

</div>

The findings of this study suggest that community college academic deans face four types of difficult decisions. Difficult decisions are those that (a) may have a negative impact on

individuals involved in a decision-making situation, (b) challenge deans' personal integrity, (c)
may damage relationships and trust with colleagues, and (d) may be misinterpreted by
colleagues. All these decisions represented ethical dilemmas requiring academic deans to make a
choice between conflicting values and beliefs causing emotional turmoil and self-doubt.

Negative Impact on an Individual

Decisions that could result in negative consequences for an individual's livelihood,
career, and family appeared as difficult for academic deans. These decisions caused internal
conflict between academic deans' professional responsibility to the college and responsibility to
the individuals whose future depended on deans' decisions. Although in all situations the
decision outcome depended on what deans believed was the right thing to do, all academic deans
felt the need to make a fair decision for all involved.

Challenged Personal Integrity

Decisions that challenged deans' personal integrity were difficult. Most deans mentioned
the importance of protecting one's integrity and aligning one's actions with personal values.
Therefore, decisions that challenged the deans' guiding principles and beliefs and forced them to
act against their value system caused a lot of emotional turmoil. All deans faced with such an
ethical dilemma chose to do what agreed with their values and beliefs. In situations involving
risk to their reputation and career, deans still chose to maintain their integrity. When deans'
actions were constrained by power imbalances, they looked for ways to do everything that was in
their power to do what they believed was right, including going against institutional practice or
circumventing policies and procedures.

Risk of Damaged Relationships and Broken Trust

The decisions risking relationships with colleagues and their trust were also difficult for

academic deans. As middle-level administrators, deans often had to resolve issues involving opposing needs and interests of multiple stakeholders they served. Making decisions in such situations was challenging because of the emotional turmoil deans experienced when trying to preserve relationships and trust with representatives of opposing parties. The implications of ruined relationships and broken trust involved serious consequences for deans' ability to manage others and their leadership effectiveness. As a result, academic deans had to come up with creative solutions to maintain trust and relationships with all involved in a challenging situation.

Risk of Negative Perceptions

Decisions that could be misinterpreted by colleagues also emerged as difficult for academic deans. Although deans did not attempt to please everyone when making decisions, they considered people's perceptions in decision-making. Deans talked about the importance of setting a good example and maintaining clarity, transparency, and consistency in decision-making to prevent people from forming wrong perceptions. Deans also realized that with every decision they set a precedent for other decisions and actions, so they tried to be careful to avoid having more problems in the future.

Although deans were aware of the risks people's wrong perceptions posed to their reputation and the reputation of other people, they were rarely able to address them because of confidentiality requirements or other professional obligations. Such situations caused emotional turmoil. On the one hand, deans were concerned about being perceived as a problem dean or a leader unable to address the challenges of the division. On the other hand, they had the responsibility to maintain their professionalism and safeguard confidential information. Consequently, academic deans had to learn to dismiss people's wrong perceptions and criticism.

Difficult Decisions, Emotions, and Values

Participants' difficult decisions involved emotions. Although deans exercised their due diligence responsibly by collecting information and investigating all sides of an issue, deans' approach to making decisions was not strictly rational. For instance, academic deans tasked with making personnel decisions regarding conflicts between employees, employee evaluations, and dismissals described having a lot of data pointing to the poor performance of these individuals. Moreover, when seeking advice, all were told to reprimand or dismiss the employees. Yet, their decisions were not automatic and in two cases out of four went against the advice they received from others. The idea of negatively impacting someone's livelihood caused emotions that influenced their actions and decisions. In fact, some deans sharing difficult situations involving the impact on others wished they had addressed the issues with poor-performing employees sooner, pointing out the possibility of emotions complicating their decision-making. Similar behavior was observed in other cases.

Even though three academic deans suggested they were non-emotional, their descriptions of difficult decisions suggested that emotions played an important part in the way they approached challenging decisions. As an example, one dean was willing to work the system to achieve justice, and another dean talked about her inability to lie to her faculty. In both instances, emotions guided their decisions and actions. Finally, in only one case did a dean seem to use logic and data over emotions. Interestingly, this dean struggled with finding and describing a particularly difficult decision-making situation, so I found it difficult to explore the nuances of her decision-making approach. This dean, however, openly stated that she was not involved in any personal conversations with her employees to prevent this knowledge and the emotions it provoked from impacting her decisions; thus, she admitted to the fundamental role emotions

played in information processing and decision-making. In addition, the same dean also worried about appearing heartless and cold to her colleagues, acknowledging her self-assessed lack of emotion expression as one of her weaknesses.

It is important to note that deans did not spontaneously follow their emotions to make decisions. Instead, all were involved in conscious deliberation and rational judgment, but emotions helped deans identify what they believed was the right thing to do. Therefore, emotions reflected deans' values and beliefs. Deans were mindful of their inner experiences but not overwhelmed by them. Alternatively, emotions served as markers of what deans believed allowing them to commit to actions that agreed with their value systems.

Deans' Confidence: From Self-Doubt to Growth

Most academic deans mentioned doubting themselves when making difficult decisions and questioning their choices. The emotional turmoil deans experienced in ambiguous situations was intensified by the fact that it was solely their responsibility to decide. The complexity of a difficult situation often pushed them to seek advice from others. In some situations, asking others' opinions did not help as the advice they received contradicted the deans' values. As a result, some deans' confidence in the ability to make decisions was diminished even more. In two cases, deans' lack of confidence in decision-making led them to question their leadership abilities in general. Both deans mentioned worrying about not fitting an image of a rational, non-emotional, and confident leader who would know what to do. Only one academic dean viewed uncertainty and self-doubt as positive traits that prevent leaders from making hasty decisions.

However, going through the process of making a difficult decision increased academic deans' confidence in making decisions and in leading their teams. The need to decide in a challenging situation led to increased knowledge and awareness of their character, values, and

beliefs. Deans believed making difficult decisions taught them to be better decision-makers and better leaders.

Emotional Intelligence Skills Manifested in Deans' Decision-Making

This section outlines major findings related to the second research question. The analysis led me to conclude that five emotional intelligence skills manifested in the academic deans' decision-making. These skills were (a) emotion recognition, (b) emotion self-awareness, (c) emotion understanding, (d) emotion regulation, and (d) emotion management.

Emotion Recognition

Emotion recognition guided most academic deans' communication strategy, allowing them to gain support from others when a difficult decision had to be made. Some of these deans, skillful in recognizing the emotions of others, mentioned learning this skill in childhood from specific family dynamics. Some deans, however, noted that emotion recognition did not come naturally to them, and they struggled to decipher the emotions of others from their body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. Three deans pointed out that emotion recognition could impede making decisions as it slowed down the decision-making process.

Emotion Self-Awareness

Academic deans' emotion self-awareness signaled to them the importance of distancing themselves from a decision-making process and taking the time to process information; thus, emotions helped prevent deans from making hasty decisions. Emotion self-awareness also helped deans to encourage emotion regulation in others, and it served as a learning tool. Being aware of one's own emotions prompted deans to search for more information until the emotion became less intense; therefore, emotion self-awareness helped them make better-informed decisions.

Emotion Regulation

Deans relied mostly on physiological and social strategies to control their emotions, with only two deans using cognitive strategies. Among the strategies the deans used were breathing, physical activity, venting, and emotional reappraisal. These various emotion regulation techniques assisted deans in information processing, thereby allowing them to make conscious decisions.

Deans discussed the importance of emotion regulation for stress control, successful leadership, and effective decision-making. Participants regulated their emotions to maintain professionalism, control stress, and avoid misleading people. In addition, academic deans believed emotion regulation was necessary for preventing others from forming gender and race stereotypes related to emotion expression. However, several deans found it challenging to maintain a balance between emotion regulation and human-centered decision-making. Deans were concerned about appearing cold and indifferent to the issues and needs of others. Finally, academic deans' emotion regulation appeared to be improved with experience; although, for some deans improving this skill was a conscious choice.

Emotion Understanding

Emotion understanding prevented academic deans from taking offense to others' emotional reactions, which helped them to stay calm and address a challenging decision-making situation more effectively. Additionally, emotion understanding allowed academic deans to predict people's emotional responses helping them to prepare appropriately to defend their decisions and actions. More importantly, the ability to empathize with others compelled academic deans to search for solutions that would alleviate the concerns of all involved. Empathy helped deans to make fair decisions.

Emotion Management

Academic deans' emotion management included a variety of techniques that allowed

them to manage the emotions of other people. Listening actively, acknowledging and validating

people's emotions, using humor, staying positive, and taking the blame and extra work on

themselves helped academic deans to progress to the problem-solving stage of the decision-

making process quickly. By inquiring about people's desired outcomes and goals deans were

able to engage others in offering solutions to difficult decision-making situations. Finally,

explaining the reasons for actions and decisions, stopping the conversation to give others time to

calm down and think, and circling back around allowed academic deans to shift people's

perspectives; thus, helping people to consider a complex situation from a new point. A changed

perspective of others encouraged new solutions to an issue and in some instances helped in

neutralizing the problem.

Major Findings and the Literature

One of the findings of this study related to the first research question suggests that

community college academic deans' most difficult decisions stemmed from the responsibility to

balance the needs of various institutional stakeholders. The extant literature suggests that deans

often struggle to negotiate the competing interests of multiple constituents (Bray, 2008; Burns,

2008; Nguyen, 2014, Rentsch, 2018; Sill, 2014; Yamamura, 2018). The participants in my study

reconfirmed such struggles in a variety of ways. Deans were forced to address conflicting

interests of upper administration and faculty, faculty and students, faculty and faculty, various

community groups and student groups, or advocate for the needs of three or more groups

simultaneously. Operating in such a complex environment caused a lot of stress and emotional

turmoil, matching the findings of Rentsch (2018) and Yamammura (2018).

Consistent with Nguyen (2018), academic deans viewed their early days as a dean as one of the most difficult times in their careers. Although multiple participants mentioned the challenges of transitioning into a deanship, one participant extensively talked about the stress she endured during the first several months as a community college dean. Similarly, another participant noted that at no other time had he experienced the same feelings and emotions as when he tried to establish himself as a new division leader. Nguyen (2018) contends that leadership transition challenges are common among mid-level managers due to a lack of institutional knowledge and knowledge of organizational dynamics. The difficulty of transitioning from a faculty to a dean position was intensified by the change of relationships with their former colleagues, who no longer associated newly appointed deans as a part of their group (Nguyen 2018). In my study, participants described a feeling of isolation after stepping into a dean's role corroborating the similar findings of other scholars (Bray, 2008; Knirk, 2013; McManus, 2013).

Difficult Decisions Involve Ethical Dilemmas

The most difficult decisions for community college academic deans in this study were ethical dilemmas in which they had to choose between conflicting values and beliefs. Although some other decisions such as making a schedule or creating a budget were identified by deans as difficult because of the amount of time they consumed, they did not cause nearly as much stress and emotional turmoil as those involving an ethical choice. The decisions that could impact someone's livelihood, challenge deans' integrity, damage relationships with others, and trigger inaccurate perceptions were among the most difficult.

These findings are consistent with the literature on community college ethical decision-making (Burns, 2008; Garza Mitchell, 2012; Gonzales, 2019; Herndon, 2015; Smith & Fox,

2019). Specifically, in exploring the role that ethics plays in the decision-making process of community college deans and division chairs, Burns (2008) found personal belief systems, the impact of the decision on others, and the relationships with other people influenced her participants' decision-making. Considering Burns' findings, it is understandable why the decisions that involved challenged integrity, impacted others, or could jeopardize the relationships and trust with colleagues were difficult for community college deans. These factors altered the way community college deans perceived the situation and forced them to spend more time contemplating the solutions that would prevent them from betraying their own values and hurting or ruining relationships with others.

The risk of other people's negative perceptions was not specifically addressed in Burns (2008). However, the absence of the impact of negative perceptions on deans' decision-making in Burns can be explained. Although decisions involving the risk of people forming wrong perceptions were challenging for the deans in my study, deans pointed out that their goal was not to make everybody happy. Thus, while the perceptions of others complicated deans' decision-making, they were less likely to impact it, particularly when perceptions could not have been addressed because of the confidentiality of a situation.

Difficult Decisions and Personal Values

One of the most important findings of this research is the deans' refusal to go against their personal values. Although deans talked about the importance of considering institutional priorities, using policy, and doing what is in the best interest of students, contrary to the findings of Ellis (2020) and Mazeh (2011), I did not find academic deans adhering solely to college mission and policies when making decisions. Ellis (2020) explored the impact of emotional intelligence on leadership capacity in higher education administrators in eastern Tennessee and

found administrators focused on institutional policy when making decisions. Mazeh (2011) explored community college leaders' experiences in leadership and tried to understand if they implemented emotional intelligence skills in their professional roles. Mazeh found that community college leaders lacked the knowledge of theory and the skills of emotional intelligence; thus, they did not apply them in their leadership roles. When making decisions, these leaders focused on implementing the institutional mission and policy.

The results of my study suggest that when faced with decision-making situations, particularly those threatening their personal integrity, deans chose to do what was in line with their personal belief systems. The contrast in findings between this study and Ellis's (2020) study may be due to the difference in data collection methods. In Ellis (2020) participants were asked to describe their decision-making related to a case study scenario, not an actual situation they had to experience in their lives. Although a case study provided the information, it is unlikely that it triggered an emotional reaction in participants, which potentially affected their responses. A possible explanation for the inconsistencies between the findings of this study and Mazeh (2011) might be related to the differences in emotional intelligence level of the participants. Since Mazeh (2011) did not identify the leaders' emotional intelligence, it may be that these participants did not possess the very skills that the researcher intended to explore.

Moreover, the results of this study demonstrated that academic deans stayed true to their values even if the decision supporting their beliefs went against institutional policy, established practice, or directives of upper-level administrators. Therefore, the outcome of a difficult decision depended on what the deans believed was the right thing to do. This finding corroborates a study by Smith and Fox (2020), who found that community college presidents used their personal knowledge and beliefs in making decisions.

The importance of personal values in the decision-making of community college leaders is also reflected in Burns (2008), Garza Mitchell (2012), Gonzales (2019), and Hornak and Garza Mitchell (2016). Garza Mitchell (2012) found that community college presidents' values significantly impacted their decision-making and influenced college decision-making in general. From the results of my study, it is evident that such modeling of values also occurred between academic deans and their followers. Being aware that values modeled by them impacted the decision-making choices of their employees, deans were concerned about setting the right precedent and a good example when making decisions.

Following personal values guided academic deans in making unpopular or controversial decisions. Consider Lauren, who decided to make two faculty members hostile to each other co-teach a course, or Kathryn, who went against a faculty course syllabus to help a student. This result is similar to Hornak and Garza Mitchell (2016), mentioned earlier, who also found that following personal values allowed the presidents to make tough, unpopular, and controversial decisions.

The reliance on personal belief systems in decision-making was also noted in Burns (2008). Burns reported that in making decisions academic deans and division chairs prioritized maintaining personal integrity which is consistent with the result of this research. Moreover, my findings demonstrate that deans, when forced to make a decision contradicting their personal integrity, either risked being accused of insubordination or looked for a way to work the system so personal integrity could be maintained.

Difficult Decisions, Emotions, and Self-Doubt

For most deans in this study, the influence of emotions was either clearly stated or obvious. Even though deans took the time to gather all the facts on a challenging situation and

consulted the institutional policy, difficult decisions were not solved by using logic and data only. These findings are in line with Hornak and Garza Mitchell (2016), who – as noted above – explored the role of community college presidents' personal values in decision-making. Their results demonstrate that community college presidents' decision-making relied more on emotion, experience, preference, and personal values than an objective interpretation of data. Moreover, college presidents looked for data to support their decisions rather than basing their decisions on data.

One unexpected finding of this research is that the deans experienced self-doubt in challenging decision-making situations. As mentioned earlier, in some cases, self-doubt had a negative impact on the deans' self-image. Deans compared themselves with an idealized image of a rational, calm, and confident leader – a "good" leader. Not fitting that image because of the emotional struggles and uncertainty made them doubt both their decision-making and leadership skills.

These findings of emotions and self-doubt in deans' decision-making support Ayers and Gonzales (2020) who discussed emotional labor and emotion display rules among community college department chairs. They rejected the assumption that a good leader is unemotional. Moreover, they argued that "the myth of the hyper-rational and always positive administrator imposes an unrealistic and unhealthy standard" (p. 44). This study further corroborates the idea that experiencing emotions is human nature and self-doubt is a normal part of a decision-making process.

Emotional Intelligence and Decision-Making

The findings related to the second research question point to five emotional intelligence skills manifested in the academic deans' decision-making. These skills were (a) emotion

recognition, (b) emotion self-awareness, (c) emotion understanding, (d) emotion regulation, and (d) emotion management. All emotional intelligence skills besides emotion self-awareness were reflected in the theoretical framework. Emotion self-awareness emerged as a separate emotional intelligence skill in this study.

Emotion Recognition

The theoretical framework used in this study is based on Schlegel and Mortillaro (2019), who describe emotion recognition as an ability to accurately recognize the emotions of other people from a variety of nonverbal expressions. Interestingly, my findings indicate that for some academic deans, the choice of words used by another person could also serve as an indicator of specific emotion. Consider Victoria who relied on the choice of words people used to determine the intensity of their emotions. Thus, along with body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, the choice of words could be indicative of people's emotions and, particularly, the emotion intensity.

Caruso (2004) and Schlegel (2020) argue that the ability to accurately recognize nonverbal signals allows individuals to anticipate the intentions and thoughts of other people and adjust their own responses or actions as needed. The findings of this study accord with their arguments. I found that academic deans' emotion recognition ability allowed them to choose an appropriate communication strategy. This ability to adjust the delivery of their messages based on the people's emotional reactions allowed them to sway people's opinions to their advantage. Emotion recognition was particularly useful when the support of others was needed for an initiative.

Another important finding is that out of five emotional intelligence skills manifested in the cases of this study, emotion recognition appeared as the only skill that could potentially

impede decision-making. Although most deans used emotion recognition to guide their communication strategy, some deans mentioned that being attuned to the emotions of others could create wrong assumptions, add unnecessary complications, and slow down their decision-making process. This finding is in line with the ideas of Davis and Nichols (2016) and Lubbadeh (2020) who argue that over-sensitivity to the emotions of other people could complicate decision-making and increase leaders' stress due to the feeling of responsibility for the emotions of others.

Emotion Self-Awareness

The findings related to emotion self-awareness indicated that the ability to recognize and identify one's own emotions was an important aspect of academic deans' decision-making. Only after registering their emotional reaction, academic deans could start using techniques to regain control of their emotions. An interesting finding is the reliance of some academic deans on emotion self-awareness as a learning tool. For them, emotion served as an indicator of whether more information was needed to be able to decide. The finding hints that the investigation of an issue related to a difficult decision continues until the emotion subsides; thus, guiding the decision-making process. The importance of emotion self-awareness seems to support the results from Freed (2016) who found self-awareness to be a key aspect of community college administrators' decision-making and one of the most common emotional intelligence skills used by community college administrators.

Emotion Regulation

Compared to other core emotional intelligence skills, emotion regulation had the highest number of codes, supporting the skill among the research participants. Although in the theoretical framework used for this study (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019) emotion regulation was

conceptualized as an ability to use a variety of cognitive strategies to address one's emotional experiences, academic deans in my study used mostly physiological and social strategies to control their emotions. Only two deans mentioned emotion reappraisal for emotion regulation.

Previous studies exploring emotional intelligence in educational leadership and decision-making also found emotion regulation to be one of the emotional intelligence skills most applicable to academic leadership (Freed, 2016; Parrish, 2015). Freed (2016) found community college administrators used emotion regulation to achieve a balance of emotions and control personal emotions in the workplace, to respond to the emotions of others, and to maintain a balance between emotions at work and home. They also used emotions to communicate passion and promote transparency. Parrish (2015) shows how university leaders' emotion regulation played an important role in controlling their disruptive emotions, helping them to serve as role models to others by maintaining a high standard of conduct and developing professional relationships. The findings of my study confirmed the importance of emotion regulation for controlling stress and maintaining professionalism, as well as responding to the emotions of others. In addition, the findings of this study indicated the need for emotion regulation to avoid creating false impressions in other people. Parrish (2015) also found accurate and honest self-assessment and regular self-reflection allowed higher education leaders to identify strategies for the development of responsible management of self. These findings are aligned with the results of this study showing that for almost half of the deans developing emotion regulation was a conscious choice stemming from the observations of self and others and self-reflection.

Gender, Race and Emotion Regulation. Another unexpected finding of this research was academic deans' use of emotion regulation to avoid perpetuating common perceptions of gender and race differences in emotion expression. Female academic deans felt the need to

control their emotion expression to avoid being perceived as "emotional," "crazy," or "hysteric." James, a black male, believed controlling his emotions was necessary for him to avoid being perceived as aggressive. He also mentioned that men could be perceived as "weak" if they cried.

My choice of theoretical perspective was highly influenced by the idea that ability emotional intelligence is not a soft skill or a personality trait but rather a mental ability. As such, I intentionally chose not to emphasize the influence of gender and race in my literature review and my research. However, the relevance of gender and race differences for emotion regulation and thus, emotion intelligence in general is consistent with previous research. Puffer (2011) found gender differences in the impact of various emotional intelligence competencies on career-decision making. For women, a high level of emotion regulation ability predicted higher indecisiveness. For men, a higher emotion perception ability was positively associated with less nervousness in career decision-making (Puffer, 2011).

Other research shows that gender is also an important factor that serves as an antecedent to unethical behavior in people with high emotional intelligence (Bacon et al., 2014; Bacon & Regan, 2016; Ngoc et al., 2020; Hyde et al., 2020). Gunkel et al. (2014) explored the influence of the culture on emotional intelligence. They found that gender significantly influenced all four dimensions of emotional intelligence investigated in the study: self-emotional appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Females had lower scores in self emotional appraisal and emotion regulation than males but had higher scores in others' emotional appraisal and use of emotion.

The findings related to the relevance of race to emotion regulation are in line with Gunkel et al. (2014) and Gunkel et al. (2016), who found that different cultural dimensions impact people's emotional intelligence. Gunkel et al. (2014) argue that cultural values and norms

influence the behavior of individuals in a society. Such beliefs, according to the researchers, determine the culturally accepted ways of emotion appraisal, recognition, and expression.

Challenge of Balancing Emotion Regulation and Human-Centered Approach to Decision-Making and Leadership. Another important and unexpected finding was some deans' challenge in balancing emotion regulation and a human-centered approach to decision-making and leadership. On the one hand, deans felt the need to control their emotions to appear rational, and neutral, and to resist the influence of emotions on their decisions. One dean even avoided engaging in any personal conversations to ensure this information did not impact her reasoning in tough situations. On the other hand, deans knew that suppressing their emotions made others perceive them as cold and unsympathetic. This finding further supports Ayers and Gonzales (2020) and Tenuto et al. (2016), who discuss the importance of humanizing educational leaders by acknowledging emotions in their work and promoting emotion as an integral part of their leadership practice.

Emotion Understanding and Empathy

Emotion understanding is the ability to assess various features of a situation to infer another person's emotional state (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). This study shows that academic deans used emotion understanding to avoid taking things personally and make fair decisions. Perhaps the most significant finding related to emotion understanding is the salience of empathy for deans' decision-making. Being able to see the situation from the point of view of multiple people and understand what led to their emotions helped academic deans to make balanced decisions that considered the needs of all involved.

These results reflect Freed (2016), who also found empathy to be a prevalent component of community college leaders' emotional intelligence. Freed shows how leaders can use empathy

to understand others, facilitate action, and prevent problems. Other two themes related to empathy in Freed (2016) were the consideration of the whole person and leaders' use of empathy to restrain themselves. The theme of the importance of empathy for problem prevention reflects the findings of this study indicating that emotion understanding allowed academic deans to predict people's reactions. Predicting people's reactions helped academic deans to adequately prepare to defend their decisions if needed; hence, preventing problems.

Additionally, in accordance with the present results on empathy, Parrish (2015) demonstrated empathy as an important emotional intelligence trait relevant to effective higher education academic leadership. Parrish found university academics exhibiting empathy were more effective in promoting the productivity and success of their teams. Academic deans' desire to be fair to all involved stemming from their empathy corroborates Parish's findings. Since perceptions of fairness tend to drive people's work efforts (Kropp et al., 2022), it is likely that the fairness that academic deans tried to achieve in their decision-making helped them to support and motivate their colleagues, thus, promoting teams' productivity and success.

Emotion Management

Schlegel and Mortillaro (2019) describe emotion management as the ability to respond to the emotions of others by selecting an appropriate behavioral strategy. The results of this study showed that academic deans employed a variety of emotion management strategies to control the emotions of others. Employing these strategies allowed academic deans to progress to the brainstorming stage of the decision-making process quickly, engage others in problem-solving, and shift people's perspectives so a reasonable solution could be found. The results thus obtained are compatible with Freed (2016). Freed (2016) found community college leaders used emotion management mostly to facilitate progress or action and promote productivity. Emotion

management was also used as a stabilizing mechanism within the institutions and as a way to hold people responsible for their emotions. Therefore, similarly to the findings of this study, Freed (2016) indicates management of other's emotions is an important aspect of community college leadership.

Deans' Emotional Intelligence in Decision-Making and Theoretical Framework

In the theoretical framework used in this study, emotional intelligence is conceptualized as a set of four related skills: (a) emotion recognition, (b) emotion understanding, (c) emotion regulation in oneself, and (d) emotion management (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019). Although emotional intelligence skills demonstrated by academic deans are noticeably aligned with the skills proposed by the framework, there were some differences in the findings related to emotional intelligence skills as compared to those suggested by Schlegel and Mortillaro (2019). Therefore, considering the current study's findings, I propose changes to the theoretical framework. In proposing the changes, I am aware that my recommendations stem from the findings related to the experiences of only a small number of community college academic deans; thus, they may not be adopted by researchers in other settings. However, the revised framework may inform future studies on emotional intelligence and decision-making in a similar setting.

Specifically, I suggest adding emotion self-awareness as an ability in the emotional intelligence model. Emotion self-awareness includes deans' ability to be conscious of their own emotions by registering their physiological responses, identifying and acknowledging their emotions, as well as understanding the reasons and consequences of their emotions. This ability to be aware of one's own emotions appeared as a critical skill in deans' decision-making. Emotion self-awareness allowed academic deans to create space between their emotions and

actions. In this space, deans were able to identify and examine the emotions which helped information processing and prevented rushed decisions. Most importantly, emotion self-awareness served as a learning tool in participants' decision-making. Identifying and examining their emotions in each step of the decision-making process, seemed to help in determining whether deans were moving in the right direction. It allowed them to be more conscious of their values and helped align their decisions and actions with those values.

Goleman (2005) also viewed self-awareness as an important emotional intelligence skill that allowed individuals to step back from emotional experiences. He believes that self-awareness helps people to be aware of their emotions rather than being immersed or lost in them. It may be assumed that self-awareness forces people's attention to be carried away by emotions through the amplification of their experiences. However, Goleman (2005) argues that instead, it represents a neutral mode, allowing an individual to maintain self-reflectiveness amidst strong emotions.

It is possible to assume that emotion self-awareness is simply a part of emotion regulation, as the latter cannot happen without the former. However, the findings of this study suggest that there is a distinction between these two skills, particularly in the way they relate to decision-making. Although both skills assist with information processing and keeping emotions aside, only emotion self-awareness appeared to serve as a learning tool. I, therefore, agree with Goleman (2005), who points out that recognizing one's emotions is different from trying to refrain from acting on one's emotions. Moreover, I concur with the idea that emotion self-awareness is a more powerful skill than emotion regulation. First, as Goleman (2005) points out: "It offers a greater degree of freedom – not just the option not to act on it [strong emotion], but the added option to try to let go of it." (p. 48) Secondly, considering the results of the current

study, emotion self-awareness has the power to guide the decision-making process, as it allows understanding of how and why one's own emotions could affect decisions. In sum, adding emotion self-awareness to the framework allows accounting for nonreactive attention to one's own emotions. A revised framework is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Revised Framework of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence Skill	Skill Description
Emotion Recognition	An ability to accurately recognize the emotions of other people from a variety of nonverbal expressions.
Emotion Understanding	An ability to assess various features of a situation to infer another person's emotional state.
Emotion Management	An ability to respond to the emotions of others by selecting an appropriate behavioral strategy.
Emotion Self-Awareness	An ability to identify, acknowledge, and understand one's own emotions.
Emotion Regulation	An ability to use a variety of cognitive strategies to address one's emotional experiences.

Discussion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that emotions play an important role in deans' decision-making. Emotions appeared to be deeply integrated into academic deans' decision-making, and in complex situations served as internal guides pointing them in the right direction. More importantly, emotions pointed to what academic deans valued. They encouraged academic deans' deeper analytical skills by slowing them down for a more controlled, conscious, and rational decision-making, helping them to find a solution aligned with what was important to them.

Academic deans' emotional intelligence played a valuable role in blending deans' emotions with their analytical thinking. It is not coincidental that the fourth edition of the *Competencies for Community College Leaders* by the American Association of Community Colleges (Royal, 2022) identified emotional intelligence as one of the key abilities characterizing effective community college leaders. Academic deans' emotional intelligence allowed for integrating emotion and reason when dealing with complex and ambiguous issues and manifested in academic deans' decision-making in several ways. The ability to recognize the emotions of others guided the deans' communications strategy. Through emotion self-awareness, deans were able to identify their own emotions and the reasons behind those emotions. They used this knowledge as a learning tool for collecting more information and making well-informed decisions. Emotion regulation helped academic deans control their emotions and prevented emotions from adversely affecting their judgment; thus, deans were able to make more conscious decisions. The ability to recognize, understand, and manage the emotions of other people allowed academic deans to find an appropriate approach to enable others to consider a variety of solutions resulting in reasonable, fair decisions.

This study also showed that academic deans' decisions were based on complex circumstances, risks and benefits, and information from conflicting sources. In deciphering such information to make an ethical decision, deans experienced a lot of emotional turmoil and self-doubt. Emotional tension and uncertainty were common among all academic deans, even those with many years of leadership experience. With only one participant naming self-doubt as a positive trait, it was striking that the rest of the deans associated confidence with successful leadership and viewed doubt as a limitation. Indeed, from the trait approach perspective of leadership confidence or self-confidence is empathized as a trait crucial for successful leadership

as it allows leaders to influence others (Northouse, 2019). Although the skills approach to leadership shifts the focus from personality characteristics to a leader's skills and abilities, it still shows individual attributes impacting leadership skills and knowledge (Northouse, 2019). Personality as listed among these attributes with confidence and adaptability described as beneficial to leaders' performance (Northouse, 2019). A popular transformational leadership approach highlights the importance of individualized influence or charisma, which in turn includes self-confidence among important personality characteristics (Northouse, 2019). From the perspective of authentic leadership, among four key positive psychological attributes impacting this type of leadership are confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience (Northouse, 2019). Although other leadership theories, including servant leadership, adaptive leadership, and situational leadership do not mention confidence among important attributes (Northouse, 2019), neither do any of them point to the possibility of a leader experiencing a lack of confidence and still being an effective leader. By extension, my suggestion that the very lack of confidence can become the source of leadership success seems to be even more radical.

However, considering the findings of this study, it is possible to conclude that self-confidence is an outcome of success rather than its cause and that the role of self-doubt in leadership is underrated. Having an emotional reaction to a challenging issue and questioning oneself is a natural part of the human experience, and it can be beneficial to a decision-making process. Experiencing emotional turmoil and doubt internally does not prevent individuals from making confident decisions and appearing confident externally. In fact, experiencing self-doubt and accompanying emotions may prevent leaders from assuming they know everything and making rushed decisions, motivate them to put more effort into searching for relevant information, encourage them to take time to listen to all voices, and help to make decisions

taking into account the needs and concerns of all involved. Moreover, as the current study's findings show, resolving challenging decision-making situations that involve uncertainty and emotions not only improves decision-making skills but boosts leaders' confidence. Thus, embracing emotions and self-doubt in decision-making and leadership, in general, can provide leaders with an opportunity to face their fears and see difficult situations as a chance for growth and development.

Practical Implications

The current study provides unique insights into community college deans' difficult decisions and the manifestation of emotional intelligence in their decision-making. In the following section, I discuss the implications for community college professional practice. I will first outline the implications for aspiring academic deans. In the implications for upper-level administrators, I will discuss the importance of emotional intelligence education and training, as well as the significance of embracing leaders' vulnerability. The implications for the education leadership preparation program directors will also be discussed. I will conclude this section with theoretical implications.

Implications for Aspiring Academic Deans

The current study is one of the few that has explored the challenges that community college academic deans face when making decisions with no obvious right choice, and the way emotional intelligence is revealed in that process. The findings suggest that emotional turmoil and self-doubt appeared as common and natural experiences in deans' difficult decision-making. These findings provide support for humanizing the work of community college administrators.

The results underscore the importance of recognizing, acknowledging, and normalizing emotions and self-doubt in the work of academic leaders and eliminating the stigma associated

with self-doubt and emotion expression in leadership. Being an effective leader does not mean being emotionless and free from doubt. In fact, the findings of the present study showed that unemotional leaders could appear indifferent and cold to others. Therefore, successful leadership is less about suppressing emotions and self-doubt and more about learning how to deal with emotions and lack of confidence constructively.

Individuals aspiring to serve in leadership positions should not dwell on whether they are too sensitive or too indecisive but instead should focus on acceptance and action in the face of emotional exposure and doubts. Practicing making independent decisions amidst emotions and self-doubt and accepting the responsibility for the consequences of these decisions can help aspiring leaders improve their decision-making and leadership skills, thus, boosting their confidence. After all, success and confidence come with experience, and confidence is a result of a successful leadership journey, not its prerequisite.

Aspiring leaders should also focus on developing their emotional intelligence skills, particularly emotion self-awareness and regulation. Many deans pointed to the possibility of growth in these areas with conscious effort and experience. Special attention should be given to the development of cognitive strategies for emotion regulation since the knowledge and application of these strategies among academic deans appear limited. Yet, cognitive strategies, affecting how people think, are shown to be more effective for emotion control in the workplace than behavioral and social strategies (Schlegel & Mortillaro, 2019).

There are numerous strategies for improving one's emotional intelligence skills. Deutsch (2021) suggests starting with practicing self-awareness by acknowledging the way emotions impact one's behavior and actions. Among other techniques are keeping a personal emotions list, practicing positive self-talk and mindfulness, and suppressing superfluous emotions (Deutsch,

2021). Grant et al. (2014) highlighted the importance of experiential learning and emotional writing for the development of emotional intelligence abilities. Digital games may also be effective in the development and improvement of emotional intelligence, including in people with special emotional and educational needs (Papoutsi et al., 2022).

Implications for Upper-Level Administrators

The study's findings suggest that emotional intelligence skills assisted deans in making conscious, better-informed, and fair decisions. Considering that emotionally intelligent individuals may also be higher performing, more committed to their organizations, may show greater job satisfaction and fewer turnover intentions than those with lower levels of emotional intelligence (Maamari & Majdalani, 2016; Miao et al., 2017; O'Boyle et al., 2011), it can be assumed that developing academic leaders' emotional intelligence skills can be beneficial not only for individuals but for organizations in general. Community college upper-level administrators could play an important role in encouraging the development of emotional intelligence skills of employees on their campuses.

One of the ways to achieve the awareness and application of emotional intelligence on campuses is through education and training on emotional intelligence as related to decision-making. Such training could be provided by a third-party training provider or could be created and administered in-house. Emotional intelligence training may not only improve individual decision-making but may also have a positive effect on group decision-making, as team-level emotional intelligence improves team decision-making performance through psychological safety (Zhou et al., 2020). More importantly, taking into account that community college employees look up to their leaders (Garza Mitchell, 2012), modeling their own development in emotional intelligence may serve as an even stronger motivator for others.

Modeling Emotional Intelligence Development

Embracing the development of emotional intelligence may be relevant now more than ever when community colleges similarly to other higher education institutions engage in conversations and initiatives around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Upper-level leaders can contribute to the creation of more diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments in their colleges by modeling the development of their own emotional intelligence. Pausing to observe, understand, and accept their own emotions without judgment helps leaders to understand and accept the emotions of others. Listening empathetically to the views, perspectives, and experiences of others and noticing one's emotional reactions to this information may assist leaders in discovering their biases and perspectives, thus, helping them to shift their mindsets. Emotional intelligence may encourage open conversations about people's differences as it allows one to acknowledge one's biases instead of suppressing or ignoring them. It is then possible to address those biases to ensure they do not impact one's actions that may have led to the systemic problems leaders are trying to combat. Hence, focusing on the development of one's own emotional intelligence may reduce unconscious biases assisting upper-level leaders in creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments.

Embracing Vulnerability

One of the issues emerging from the findings of deans' lack of confidence and emotional distress in decision-making relates specifically to the upper-level leaders' expression of vulnerability. Psychologist Brené Brown, in her bestseller *Dare to Lead,* based on over 20 years of her research on daring leadership, defines vulnerability as the emotion people experience "during times of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (Brown, 2018, p. 19). Brown (2018) debunks the myth that effective leaders are infallible and invulnerable. Instead, she notes that

embracing leadership often requires accepting vulnerabilities, admitting not having the right answers, and having the courage to continue amidst failure.

Similarly, Ito and Bligh (2017) argued that leaders expressing vulnerability may develop stronger relationships with their followers. By disclosing their emotions and expressing humility, self-awareness, and the courage to acknowledge imperfections, leaders can connect with their followers at an emotional level (Ito & Bligh, 2017). This connection and trust sparked by leaders' vulnerability allows the creation of supporting environments in which people feel safe to make mistakes and learn; thus, focusing on growth rather than perfection (Parjoleanu, 2020).

Applying Brown's (2018) ideas to community college upper-level leaders' practice may help foster a culture of transparency, collaboration, and innovation. Upper-level administrators should openly recognize low confidence as normal and provide mentoring that address it. Upper-level leaders should also take ownership of both their strengths and weaknesses, take time to understand where they lie, and what perceptions and biases they need to address. If upper-level leaders dare to show vulnerability, admit they have weaknesses and need help, and express emotions, followers, most likely, will also feel safe to talk about their weaknesses, ask for and offer help, and share their honest views and opinions. Thus, acknowledging that all are afraid of the unknown can serve as empowerment to trust and help each other in achieving institutional goals.

Implications for Education Leadership Preparation Faculty

The results of the current study show that deans' difficult decisions are ethical. Academic deans found it challenging to choose between conflicting values and beliefs. This finding has implications for university educational leadership preparation programs indicating that education in ethics and ethical decision-making is important. Although there is a discussion among scholars

on the value of applying various ethical decision-making frameworks to community college leadership (Anderson & Davies, 2000; Oliver & Hioco, 2012; Wood & Hilton, 2012), the theory does not seem to be integrated into practice. Therefore, university-based community college leadership faculty may consider incorporating ethical decision-making into the curriculum. Teaching ethics and ethical decision-making may not only help future academic leaders navigate their ethical decision-making but can also contribute to the discovery of their values and the development of crucial emotional intelligence competencies (Harati, 2013).

Additionally, university-based leadership faculty may consider integrating emotional intelligence training and education into their curriculum. The findings of this study as well as research on the topic of emotional intelligence development (Gilar-Corbí et al., 2018) suggest that emotional competence can be taught in higher education. Gilar-Corbí et al. (2018) found that an emotional intelligence training program using a multimethodological approach (online, in the classroom, and coaching) was successful in developing university students' emotional intelligence. The researchers argue that a university environment is an ideal environment for the optimization of emotional intelligence skills. Therefore, not only can such training provide professional benefits for future educational leaders, but it can equip graduates with important life skills helping them to overcome obstacles, address problems, and persevere in achieving their goals and objectives (Gilar-Corbí et al., 2018).

Theoretical Implications

This study is one of the few that has applied an ability emotional intelligence framework to educational leaders' decision-making experiences. The results showed that all four skills presented in the framework of Schlegel and Mortillaro (2019) manifested in academic deans' decision-making. However, the findings indicated that academic deans applied one more skill to

their decision-making: emotion self-awareness. As mentioned above, emotion self-awareness served a unique purpose in deans' decision-making, appearing as an indicator of whether more information was needed for deans to be able to decide. Therefore, I recommend adding emotion self-awareness as a fifth component of the ability emotion intelligence model.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study provides insight into the manifestation of emotional intelligence in community college academic deans' decision-making. This study is among the first qualitative studies that have explored how community college academic deans apply emotional intelligence to decision-making through the experiences of highly emotionally intelligent participants. The findings suggest that ethical decisions causing emotional turmoil and self-doubt were difficult for academic deans. Additionally, the findings showed that five emotional intelligence skills that manifested in the academic deans' decision-making contributed to better-informed, conscious, and fair decisions.

Several themes became apparent throughout this study that could benefit from further research. First, investigating the relationship between ability emotional regulation, decision-making, and gender in a community college mid-level leadership context can be beneficial for a greater understanding of how gender and emotion expression perceptions influence decision-making. Further research on emotion expression rules for people of different races/cultures may shed light on the differences, if any, in decision-making approaches.

Considering that academic deans felt the need to control their emotions to prevent others from forming and perpetuating gender and race stereotypes, maintain professionalism, and avoid misleading people future researchers may investigate the impact of deans' emotional labor and emotion display rules on deans' well-being, stress, job satisfaction, and burnout and the way

emotional intelligence mediates these relationships. Additionally, future research may explore the perceptions of emotion display rules among mid-level leaders belonging to social identity groups beyond race and gender, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and nation of origin.

Researchers may also consider exploring the interconnectedness between ability emotional intelligence, neurodivergence, and decision-making in a community college setting. Conducting a longitudinal study of community college leaders over different stages of their professional journeys may help to better understand how emotional intelligence develops over time. Researchers may want to investigate the perceptions of leaders' emotionality and its impact on followers' behavior and decision-making. Finally, researchers should explore the role of self-doubt in ethical decision-making and leadership development.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the manifestation of emotional intelligence in the decision-making of community college academic deans. This multiple-case study answered the research questions through the identification of themes pertaining to the experiences of highly emotionally intelligent academic deans who shared their most difficult decision-making situations. The findings suggest that community college academic deans faced serious decisions in their professional roles and making these decisions was not an easy task.

When forced to choose between values that mattered to them, such as loyalty, integrity, compassion, responsibility, justice, respect, professionalism, honesty, and trustworthiness, deans experienced emotional distress and self-doubt. Although emotions seemed to be involved in deans' decision-making, deans did not unconsciously follow emotions to make decisions. On the

contrary, emotions guided academic deans in conscious deliberation while pointing to their personal beliefs and values. Emotional intelligence assisted academic deans in being mindful of their own and others' emotional experiences but prevented them from being overwhelmed by them. Applying emotion recognition, self-awareness, understanding, regulation, and management assisted academic deans in making well-informed, conscious, and fair decisions.

Although most deans questioned themselves when making decisions, each challenging situation served as a learning experience. Moreover, having the courage to trust themselves in making an ethical choice not only helped them discover their values but also improved their decision-making and augmented their confidence. Thus, the findings serve as an encouragement to aspiring leaders who still doubt their decision-making and leadership skills. They suggest that along with emotional intelligence, leadership can be developed, and anyone willing to invest the time and effort can become an effective leader.

Researcher Experience

In reflecting on my own assumptions about effective leadership, I also found myself believing that confidence and absence of emotions were critical components, the foundation of leadership. Moreover, deeper reflection led me to realize that my true motivation for this study stemmed from my own self-doubt. The emotions and indecisiveness that I experienced when making decisions as a department chair made me question my decision-making skills and my ability to be an effective leader. I was uncertain if I had what it takes to be a good leader.

Interestingly, at the beginning of this dissertation journey, I was not brave enough to accept my self-doubt. Disclosing it to other people was out of the question. However, after hearing the stories of my participants I feel liberated and no longer afraid to admit my struggles. Learning about deans' challenges, emotions, and doubts in decision-making helped me realize I

was not alone, and that my experiences were normal. Their stories reassured me that my confidence could be developed. They encouraged me to use my emotions and self-doubt for my benefit and to act despite the turmoil I may experience. I have hope that just like my participants I will be getting better and better with each tough decision I make, and my confidence will grow as a result. I hope the participants' experiences shared in this dissertation will encourage future leaders to believe in themselves as they encouraged me.

REFERENCES

Adams-Dunford, J., Cuevas, F., & Neufeldt, E. (2019). Navigating your career as a mid-level manager. *New Directions for Student Services, 2019*(166), 29-40. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss

Akamatsu, D., & Gherghel, C. (2021). The bright and dark sides of emotional intelligence: Implications for educational practice and better understanding of empathy. *International Journal of Emotional Education, 13*(1), 3-19.

Alkozei, A., Schwab, Z. J., & Killgore, W. D. (2016). The role of emotional intelligence during an emotionally difficult decision-making task. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 40*, 39-54. https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10919-015-0218-4

Alkozei, A., Smith, R., Demers, L. A., Weber, M., Berryhill, S. M., & Killgore, W. D. S. (2019). Increases in emotional intelligence after an online training program are associated with better decision-making on the Iowa Gambling Task. *Psychological Reports, 122*(3), 853-879. https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033294118771705

Anderson, S. K., & Davies T. G. (2000). An ethical decision-making model: A necessary tool for community college presidents and boards of trustees. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 24*(9), 711-727. https://doi.org/10.1080/106689200750034487u

Angelidis, J., & Ibrahim, N. A. (2011). The impact of emotional intelligence on the ethical judgment of managers. *Journal of Business Ethics, 99*, 111-119. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1158-5

Ashkanasy, N. M., & Daus, C. S. (2005). Rumors of the death of emotional intelligence in organizational behavior are vastly exaggerated. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26*, 441-452. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.320

Ashkanasy, N. M., & Dorris, A. D. (2017). Emotions in the workplace. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 4*, 67-90.

Ayers, D. F. (2009). Institutional contradiction in the community college. *Community College Review, 37*(2), 165-184. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552109348042

Ayers, D. F., & Gonzales, L. D. (2020). Emotional labor and midlevel leadership. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 191*, 43-55. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc

Bacon, A. M., Burak, H., & Rann, J. (2014). Sex differences in the relationship between sensation seeking, trait emotional intelligence and delinquent behavior. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology, 25*(6), 673-683. https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2014.943796

Bacon, A. M., & Regan, L. (2016). Manipulative relational behaviour and delinquency: Sex differences and links with emotional intelligence. *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology, 27*(3), 331-348. https://doi.org/10.1080/14789949.2015.1134625

Bar-On, R. (1997). *Emotional quotient inventory: Technical manual*. Multi-Health Systems.

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 544-559. http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol13/iss4/2

Bhaskar, R. (1978). *A realist theory of science* (2nd ed.). Harvester Press.

Bhaskar, R. (1986). *Scientific realism and human emancipation*. Verso Editions.

Boggs, G. R., & McPhail, C. J. (2020). Strategies for issues management for midlevel leaders. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 191*, 11-20. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20402

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2003). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.

Bogna, F., Raineri, A., & Dell, G. (2020). Critical realism and constructivism: Merging research paradigms for a deeper qualitative study. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 15*(4), 461-484. https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-06-2019-1778

Bracket, M., Rivers, S., & Salovey, P. (2011). Emotional intelligence: Implications for personal, social, academic, and workplace success. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 5*(1), 88-103. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00334.x

Bray, N. J. (2008). Proscriptive norms for academic deans: Comparing faculty expectations across institutional and disciplinary boundaries. *The Journal of Higher Education, 79*(6), 692-721.

Brown, B. (2018). *Dare to lead*. Vermilion.

Burns, M. A. (2008). *The role of ethics in decision making by deans and division chairs of community colleges* [Doctoral dissertation, Gonzaga University]. ProQuest LLC.

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(5), 545-547.

Caruso, (2004). *The MSCEIT resource report.* Multi-Health Systems Inc. https://storefront.mhs.com/collections/msceit

Caruso, D. R., Salovey, P., Brackett, M., & Mayer, J. D. (2015). The ability model of emotional intelligence. In S. Joseph (Ed.), Positive psychology in practice. *Promoting human flourishing in work, health, education, and everyday life* (545-558). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Checa, P., & Fernández-Berrocal, P. (2019). Cognitive control and emotional intelligence: Effect of the emotional content of the task. Brief reports. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 1-4.

https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00195

Cleverley-Thompson, S. (2016). The role of academic deans as entrepreneurial leaders in higher

    education institutions. *Innovative Higher Education, 41*(1), 75-85.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-015-9339-2

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for*

    developing grounded theory (3d ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Côté, S. (2017). Enhancing managerial effectiveness via four core facets of emotional

    intelligence: Self-awareness, social perception, emotion understanding, and emotion

    regulation. *Organizational Dynamics, 46*, 140-147.

    http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2017.05.007

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five*

    approaches (2d ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Dahl, D., & Cilliers, F. (2012). The relationship between cognitive ability, emotional intelligence

    and negative career thoughts: A study of career-exploring adults. *SA Journal of Human*

    Resource Management, 13(1), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v10i2.461

Dasborough, M., & Harvey, P. (2017). Schadenfreude: The (not so) secret joy of another's

    misfortune. *Journal of Business Ethics, 141*(4), 693-707. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-

    016-3060-7

Davis, S., & Nichols, R. (2016). Does emotional intelligence have a "dark" side? A review of the

    literature. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7*, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01316

De Boer, H., & Goedegebuure, L. (2009). The changing nature of the academic deanship.

    Leadership, 5(3), 347-364. https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715009337765

DeJear, M. L. (2016). *A study of how culture, collaboration, and advocacy influence data-driven*

decision making at community colleges. [Doctoral dissertation, Iowa State University]. ProQuest LLC.

Deutsch, J. (2021). Surviving and thriving: Understanding and developing your emotional intelligence. *National Association for Kinesiology in Higher Education, 73*(2), 105-119. https://doi.org/10.1080/00336297.2021.1898997

Di Fabio, A., & Kenny, M. (2011). Promoting emotional intelligence and career decision making among Italian high school students. *Journal of Career Assessment, 19*(1), 21-34. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072710382530

Du Plessis, M., Wakelin, Z., & Nel, P. (2015). The influence of emotional intelligence and trust on servant leadership. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 41*(1), 1-9. https://doi.og/10.4102/sajip.v41i1.1133

Easton, G. (2010). Critical realism in case study research. *Industrial Marketing Management, 39*(1), 118-128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2008.06.004

Eddy, P. L. (2007). Grocery store politics: Leading the rural community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 31*(4), 271-290. https://doi-org.proxy.lib.odu.edu/10.1080/10668920701242670

Eddy, P. L. (2013). Developing leaders: The role of competencies in rural community colleges. *Community College Review, 41*(1), 20-43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552112471557

Ellis, R. (2020). *Emotional intelligence and decision-making in higher education administrators in post-secondary institutions in eastern Tennessee* [Doctoral dissertation, East Tennessee State University]. ProQuest LLC.

Emotional Intelligence Skills Group (2021). *About EI.* https://eimanager.com/

Evans, T. R., Steptoe-Warren, G., & Hughes, D. J. (2020). A conceptual replication of emotional

intelligence as a second-stratum factor of intelligence. *Emotion, 20*(3), 507-512.

https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000569

Fang, D., & Mainous, R. (2019). Individual and institutional characteristics associated with short

tenures of deanship in academic nursing. *Nursing Outlook, 67*(5), 578-585.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2019.03.002

Fernández-Berrocal, P., Extremera, N., Lopes, P. N., & Ruiz-Aranda, D. (2014). When to

cooperate and when to compete: Emotional intelligence in interpersonal decision-making.

Journal of Research in Personality, 49(1), 21-24.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2013.12.005

Fiori, M. A., Mikolajczak, M., Luminet, O., Hansenne, & M., Rossier, J. (2014). What is the

ability emotional intelligence test (MSCEIT) good for? An evaluation using item

response theory. *PLOS ONE, 9*(6), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0098827

Fisher, A. (2001). *Critical thinking: An introduction.* Cambridge University Press.

Fletcher, A. (2017). Applying critical realism in qualitative research: Methodology meets

method. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 20*(2), 181-194.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2016.1144401

Freed, C. A. (2016). *The role of emotional intelligence in community college leadership*

[Doctoral dissertation, Washington State University]. ProQuest LLC.

Garza Mitchell, R. L. (2012). Doing the right thing: Ethical leadership and decision making. *New*

Directions for Community Colleges, 2012(159), 63-72. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20027

García, H. A., Nehls, K., Florence K., Harwood, Y., & McClain, T. (2020). "The ones who move

things along": How women mid-level managers navigate academic landscapes. *New*

Directions for Higher Education, 2020(189), 25-39. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.20358

Gilar-Corbí, R., Pozo-Rico, T., Sánchez, B., & Castejón, L. (2018). Can emotional intelligence be taught in higher education? A randomized experimental study of an emotional intelligence training program using a multimethodological approach. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*(1039), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01039

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. Bantam Dell.

Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. Bantam.

Goleman, D. (2005). *Emotional intelligence* (10th ed.). Bantam Dell.

Goleman, D. (2021). *Daniel Goleman.* https://www.danielgoleman.info/biography/

Gonzales, S. R. (2019). A leg to stand on: Developing core beliefs and a leadership philosophy for sound ethical decision-making. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2019*(185), 43-51. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20337

Grant, L., Kinman, G., & Alexander, K. (2014). What's all this talk about emotion? Developing emotional intelligence in social work students. *Social Work Education, 33*(7), 874-889. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2014.891012

Gunkel, M., Schlägel, C., & Engle, R. L. (2014). Culture's influence on emotional intelligence: An empirical study of nine countries. *Journal of International Management, 20*(2), 256-274. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2013.10.002

Gunkel, M., Schlägel, C., & Taras, V. (2016). Cultural values, emotional intelligence, and conflict handling styles: A global study. *Journal of World Business, 51*(4), 568-585. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2016.02.001

Haidt, J. (2001). The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment. *Phycological Review, 108*, 814-834.

Hancock, D. R., & Algozzine, B. (2006). *Doing case study research. A practical guide to*

beginning researchers. Teacher College Press.

Harati, L. W. (2013). *Relationship between emotional intelligence and ethical decision making in educational leaders* [Doctoral dissertation, Saint Louis University]. ProQuest LLC.

Hardy, K. L., Williams, M. R., Bullington, K., & Commodore, F. (2021). Preparing to fill the leadership gap: The challenges facing women leaders in mid-level positions at urban community colleges. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership, 278*, 1-20. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jwel/278

Harkins, K. (2017). *Leadership competency perceptions of rural community college presidents in the coastal Southeast region* [Doctoral dissertation, Old Dominion University]. ProQuest LLC.

Hay Group. (2011). *Emotional and social competency inventory (ESCI): A user guide for accredited practitioners*. Hay Group. https://www.eiconsortium.org/pdf/ESCI_user_guide.pdf

Hays, D. G., & Singh, A. A. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry in clinical and educational settings*. Guilford.

Herndon, R. B. (2015). *Ascertaining perceptions among community college leaders regarding ethical leadership and ethical reasoning* [Doctoral dissertation, Mississippi State University]. ProQuest LLC.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2d ed.). Sage Publications.

Hornak, A. M., & Garza Mitchell, R. (2016). Changing times, complex decisions: Presidential values and decision making. *Community College Review, 44*(2), 119-134. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552116629548

Hopkins, M., & Deepa, R. (2018). The impact of emotional intelligence on ethical judgment. *Journal of Management Development, 37*(6), 503-511. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-02-2018-0045

Hyde, J., Grieve, R., Norris, K., & Kemp, N. (2020). The dark side of emotional intelligence: The role of gender and the Dark Triad in emotional manipulation at work. *Australian Journal of Phycology, 72*(4), 307-317. https:///doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12294

Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. (n.d.). *Basic classification description*. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions. Retrieved July 26, 2020, from https://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/classification_descriptions/basic.php

Issah, M. (2018). Change leadership: The role of emotional intelligence. *SAGE Open, 8*(3), 1-6. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018800910

Ito, A., & Bligh, M. C. (2017). Feeling vulnerable? Disclosure of vulnerability in the charismatic leadership. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 10*(3), 66-70. https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21492

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*(42), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1718

Jaksic, C., Schlegel, K. (2020). Accuracy in judging others' personalities: The role of emotion recognition, emotion understanding, and trait emotional intelligence. *Journal of Intelligence, 8*(3), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence8030034

Jha, P., & Bhattacharya, S. (2020). The impact of emotional intelligence and servant leadership on employee job satisfaction. *International Journal of Innovation Science, 13*(2), 205-217. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJIS-09-2020-0169

Kaiser, M. L., Hand, M. D., & Pence, E. K. (2020). Individual and community engagement in

response to environmental challenges experienced in four low-income urban

neighborhoods. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,*

17(6), 1-25. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17061831

Khosravi, P., Rezvani, A., & Ashkanasy, N. (2020). Emotional intelligence: A preventive

strategy to manage destructive influence of conflict in large scale projects. *International*

Journal of Project Management, 38(1), 36-46.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2019.11.001

Knirk, B. D. (2013). Community college administrative roles in identifying faculty for future

management positions: A phenomenological study of retired administrators. [Doctoral

dissertation, Drexel University]. ProQuest LLC.

Krishnakumar, S., Hopkins, K., Robinson., M. D. (2017). When feeling poorly at work does not

mean acting poorly at work: The moderating role of work-related emotional intelligence.

Motivation and Emotion, 41(1), 122-134. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-016-9588-0

Krishnakumar, S., Hopkins, K., Szmerekovsky, J. G., & Robinson, M. D. (2016). Assessing

workplace emotional intelligence: Development and validation of an ability-based

measure. *The Journal of Psychology, 150*(3), 371–404.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2015.1057096

Krishnakumar, S., Perera, B., Hopkins, K., & Robinson, M. D. (2019a). On being nice and

effective: Work-related emotional intelligence and its role in conflict resolution and

interpersonal problem-solving. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 37*(2), 147-167.

https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21268

Krishnakumar, S., Perera, B., Persich, M., & Robinson, M. (2019b). Affective and effective:

Military job performance as a function of work-related emotional intelligence.

International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 27(2), 203-2015.

https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsa.12239

Kropp, B., Knight, J., & Sepp, J. (2022). How fair is your workplace? *Harvard Business Review*.

https://hbr.org/2022/07/how-fair-is-your-workplace

Lambert, S. D., & Loiselle, C. G. (2008). Combining individual interviews and focus groups to

enhance data richness. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 62*(2), 228-237.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04559.x

Lawani, A. (2021). Critical realism: What you should know and how to apply it. *Qualitative*

Research Journal, 21(3), 320-333. https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-08-2020-0101

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J.E. (2019). *Practical research: Planning and design (12th Edition).*

Pearson Education.

Legree, P. J., Mullins, H. M., & Psotka, J. (2016). Comment: The ability model of emotional

intelligence: Consistency with intelligence theory. *Emotion Review, 8*(4), 301-303.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073916650500

Legree, P. J., Psotka, J., Robbins, J., Roberts, R. D., Putka, D. J., & Mullins, H. M. (2014).

Profile similarity metrics as an alternative framework to score rating-based tests:

MSCEIT reanalyses. *Intelligence, 47*, 159-174.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intell.2014.09.005

Lubbadeh, T. (2020). Emotional intelligence and leadership - The dark side and bright sides.

Modern Management Review, XXV(27), 39-50.

Maamari, B., & Majdalani, J. (2016). Emotional intelligence, leadership style and organizational

climate. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis, 25*(2), 327-345.

https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-04-2016-1010

MacCann, C., Joseph, D. L., Newman, D. A., & Roberts, R. D. (2014). Emotional intelligence is a second-stratum factor of intelligence: Evidence from hierarchical and bifactor models. *Emotion, 14*(2), 358-374. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034755

Maqbool, R., Sudong, Y., Manzoor, N., & Rashid, Y. (2017). The impact of emotional intelligence, project managers' competencies, and transformational leadership on project success. *Project Management Journal, 48*(3), 58-75.

Maul, A. (2012). The validity of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso emotional intelligence test (MSCEIT) as a measure of emotional intelligence. *Emotion Review, 4*(4), 394-402. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073912445811

Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P., (2000). Emotional intelligence meets traditional standards for an intelligence. *Intelligence, 27*(4), 267-298. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2896(99)00016-1

Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2016). The ability model of emotional intelligence: Principles and updates. *Emotion Review, 8*(4), 290-300. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073916639667

Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., Salovey, P., & Sitarenios, G. (2001). Emotional intelligence as a standard intelligence. *Emotion, 1*(3), 232-242.

Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., Salovey, P., & Sitarenios, G. (2003). Measuring emotional intelligence with the MSCEIT V2.0. *Emotion, 3*(1), 97-105. https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.3.1.97

Mayer, J. D., DiPaolo, M., & Salovey, P. (1990). Perceiving affective content in ambiguous visual stimuli: A component of emotional intelligence. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 54*, 772-781.

Mayer J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What is emotional intelligence? In P. Salovey & D. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Implications for educators* (pp. 3-31). Basic Books.

Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. (2000). Models of emotional intelligence. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of human intelligence* (pp. 396-420). Cambridge University Press.

Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. (2002). *Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) users manual*. Toronto, Ontario: Multi-Health Systems.

Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2004). Emotional intelligence: theory, findings and implications. *Psychological Inquiry, 15*(3), 197-215.

Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2008). Emotional intelligence: New ability or eclectic traits. *American Psychologist, 63*, 503–517. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.6.503

Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2012). The validity of the MSCEIT: Additional analyses and evidence. *Emotion Review, 4*(4), 403-408. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073912445815

Mazeh, Y. Y. (2011). *Community college leaders' perception of personal implementation of emotional intelligence (EI) skills* [Doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University]. ProQuest LLC.

McClure, K. R., & Teitelbaum, K. (2016). Leading schools of education in the context of academic capitalism: Deans' responses to state policy. *Policy Futures in Education, 14*(6), 793-809. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316653690

McGrew, K. (2009). CHC theory and the human cognitive abilities project: Standing on the

shoulders of the giants of psychometric intelligence research. *Intelligence, 37*(1), 1-10.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intell.2008.08.004

McManus, M. (2013). *Experiences & perceptions: A phenomenological study of the personal journey of California community college faculty who advanced into dean positions* [Doctoral dissertation, Drexel University]. ProQuest LLC.

McNair, D. E., & Perry, K. (2020). What if the middle is more than a way up? New Directions for Community Colleges, 191, 35-42. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20404

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.

Miao, C., Humphrey, R., & Qian, S. (2016). Leader emotional intelligence and subordinate job satisfaction: A meta-analysis of main, mediator, and moderator effects. *Personality and Individual Differences, 102*, 13-24. https://doi.og/10.1016/j.paid.2016.06.056

Miao, C., Humphrey, R., & Qian, S. (2017). A meta-analysis of emotional intelligence and work attitudes. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 90*(2), 177-202. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12167

Monaghan, B. W. (2017). *Leadership competencies in data driven decision making*. [Doctoral dissertation, Iowa State University]. ProQuest LLC.

Myran, G., & Parsons, M. H. (2013). Overview: The future of the urban community college. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 162*, 7-18. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20054

Mysirlaki, S., & Paraskeva, F. (2020). Emotional intelligence and transformational leadership in virtual teams: lessons from MMOGs. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 41*(4), 551-566. https://doi.og/10.1108/LODJ-01-2019-0035

Nagler, U. K. J., Reiter, K. J., Furtner, M. R., & Rauthmann, J. F. (2014). Is there a "dark intelligence"? Emotional intelligence is used by dark personalities to emotionally

manipulate others. *Personality and Individual Differences, 65*, 47-52.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.025

National Center for Educational Statistics. (n. d.). *Rural education in America*.

https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/definitions.asp

Ngoc, N. N., Tuan, N. P., & Takahashi, Y. (2020). A meta-analysis investigation of the

relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional manipulation. *SAGE open,*
10(4), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020971615

Nguyen, K. V. (2014). *Leadership development of mid-level administrators in California*

community colleges [Doctoral Dissertation, California State University]. ProQuest LLC.

Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership theory and practice* (8th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

O'Boyle, E., Humphrey, R., Pollack, J., Hawver, T., & Story, P. (2011). The relation between

emotional intelligence and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Organizational*
Behavior, 32(5), 788-818. https://doi.og/10.1002/job.714

O'Connor, P., Hill, A., Kaya, M., & Martin, B. (2019). The measurement of emotional

intelligence: A critical review of the literature and recommendations for researchers and

practitioners. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 1-19. https://doi.og/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01116

Oliver, D., & Hioco, B. (2012). An ethical decision-making framework for community college

administrators. *Community College Review, 40*(3), 240-254.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552112445611

Olsen, D. (2017). *Homegrown rural school leaders.* [Doctoral Dissertation, The University of

Iowa]. ProQuest LLC.

Papoutsi, C., Drigas, A., & Skianis, C. (2022). Serious games for emotional intelligence's skills

development for inner balance and quality of life – a literature review. *Retos, 46*, 199-

208. https://recyt.fecyt.es/index.php/retos/index

Parra, J. D., Said-Hung, E., & Montoya-Vargas, J. (2021). (Re)introducing critical realism as a
paradigm to inform qualitative content analysis in causal educational research.
International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 34(2), 168-182.
https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1735555

Parjoleanu, R. (2020). Perspectives on leadership in times of crisis. *Annals of "Dunarea de Jos"
University of Galati. Fascicle I. Economics and Applied Informatics, 26*(3), 80-88.
https://doi.org/10.35219/eai15840409140

Parrish, D. R. (2015). The relevance of emotional intelligence for leadership in a higher
education context. *Studies in Higher Education, 40*(5), 821-837.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.842225

Pathak, S., & Muralidharan, E. (2020). Implications of culturally implicit perspective of
emotional intelligence. *Cross-Cultural Research, 54*(5), 502-533. https://doi.org/
10.1177/1069397120938690

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Payne, E. (1986). *A study of emotion: Developing emotional intelligence; self-integration;
relating to fear, pain and desire*. [Doctoral Dissertation, Union Graduate School].
ProQuest LLC.

Petrides, K. V. (2009a). Psychometric properties of the Trait Emotional Intelligence
Questionnaire (TEIQue). In C. Stough, D. H. Saklofske & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.),
Assessing emotional intelligence: Theory, research, and applications (pp. 85-101).
Springer Science.

Petrides, K. V. (2009b). *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue)*. London

Psychometric Laboratory.

Petrides, K. V. (2010). Trait emotional intelligence theory. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 3*, 136-139. https://doi.og/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2010.01213.x

Petrides, K. V., & Furnham, A. (2000). On the dimensional structure of emotional intelligence. *Personality and Individual Differences, 29*(2), 313–320. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(99)00195-6

Petrides, K. V., & Furnham, A. (2003). Trait emotional intelligence: Behavioral validation in two studies of emotion recognition and reactivity to mood induction. *European Journal of Personality, 17*, 39-57. https://doi.org/10.1102/per.466

Petrides, K. V., Mikolajczak, M., Mavroveli, S., Sanchez-Ruiz, M., Furnham, A., & Pérez-González, J. (2016). Developments in trait emotional intelligence research. *Emotion Review, 8*(4), 335-341. https://doi.og/10.1177/1754073916650493

Petrides, K. V., Pérez-González, J. C., Furnham, A. (2007). On the criterion and incremental validity of trait emotional intelligence. *Cognition and Emotion, 21*(1), 26-55. https://doi.og/10.1080/02699930601038912

Puffer, K. A. (2011). Emotional intelligence as a salient predictor for collegians' career decision making. *Journal of Career Assessment, 19*(2), 130-150. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072710385545

Ramchandran, K., Tranel, D., Duster, K., & Denburg, N. L. (2020). The role of emotional vs. cognitive intelligence in economic decision-making amongst older adults. *Frontiers in Neuroscience, 14*, 1-15. https://doi.og/ 10.3389/fnins.2020.00497

Reed, M. (2013). *Confessions of a community college administrator*. Jossey-Bass.

Rentsch, K. C. (2018). *Driving from the middle: The role of community college academic deans*

during periods of planned change [Doctoral dissertation, Northeastern University]. ProQuest LLC.

Roberts, J. M. (2014). Critical realism, dialectics, and qualitative research methods. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 44*(1), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12056

Roberts, R. D., MacCann, C., Matthews, G., & Zeidner, M. (2010). Emotional intelligence: Toward a consensus of models and measures. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 4*, 821-840. https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00277.x

Roberts, R. D., Schulze, R., O'Brien, K., MacCann, C., Reid, J., & Maul, A. (2006). Exploring the validity of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) with established emotions measures. *Emotion, 6*(4), 663-669. https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.6.4.663

Robinson, V., & Donald, R. (2015). On-the-job decision making: Understanding and evaluating how leaders solve problems. In S. Chitpin & C. W. Evers (Eds.), *Decision making in educational leadership* (pp. 93-109). Routledge.

Robinson, M., Persich, M., Stawicki, C., & Krishnakumar, S. (2019). Deviant workplace behavior as emotional action: Discriminant and interactive roles for work-related emotional intelligence. *Human Performance, 32*(5), 201-219. https://doi.org/10.1080/08959285.2019.1664548

Royal, A. M. (2022). *Competencies for community college leaders* (4th ed.). American Association of Community Colleges.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc.

Salovey, P. (2010, June 21). *Emotional intelligence and leadership* [Conference session]. Global

Health Leadership Institute 2010 Conference, New Haven, CT, United States. https://www.eiconsortium.org/videos.htm

Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality, 9*, 185-211.

Schlegel, K. (2020). Inter- and intrapersonal downsides of accurately perceiving others' emotions. In R. Sternberg & A. Kostíc (Eds.), *Social Intelligence and Nonverbal Communication* (pp. 359-395). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-34964-6_13

Schlegel, K., & Mortillaro, M. (2019). The Geneva Emotional Competence Test (GECo): An ability measure of workplace emotional intelligence. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 104*(4), 559-580. https://doi.og/10.1037/apl0000365.supp

Schneider, W. J., Mayer, J. D., & Newman, D. A. (2016). Integrating hot and cool intelligences: Thinking broadly about broad abilities. *Journal of Intelligence, 4*(1), 1-25. https://doi.og/10.3390/jintelligence4010001

Scott, B. S. (2004). *The relationship between emotional intelligence and ethical decision making* [Doctoral dissertation, Union University]. ProQuest LLC.

Shenton, A. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information, 22*(2004), 63-75.

Siegling, A. B., Saklofske, D. H., & Petrides, K. V. (2015). Measures of ability and trait emotional intelligence. In G. J. Boyle, G. Matthews, & D. H. Saklofske (Eds.), *Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Constructs* (pp. 381-414). Academic Press.

Sill, N. (2014). *Life in the middle: An exploratory study of California community college instructional deans* [Doctoral Dissertation, California State University]. ProQuest LLC.

Simonet, D. V., Miller, K. E., Askew, K. L., Sumner, K. E., Mortillaro, M., & Schlegel, K.

(2021). How multidimensional is emotional intelligence? Bifactor modeling of global and

broad emotional abilities of the Geneva Emotional Competence test. *Journal of*

Intelligence, 9(1), 14-45. https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence9010014

Smith, D., & Fox, E. (2019). Ethical decision-making needs for emerging community college

leaders. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2019*(185), 75-87.

https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20340

Smith, M. M., Saklofskea, D. H., & Yan, G. (2015). Perfectionism, trait emotional intelligence,

and psychological outcomes. *Personality and Individual Differences, 85*, 155-158.

Snyder, H. (2016). Making better ethical decisions. *Portal, 16*(3), 457-463.

https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2016.0035

Soltes, E. (2017). Teaching versus living: Managerial decision making in the gray. *Journal of*

Management Education, 41(4), 455-468. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562917700187

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Stark, J. B. (2019). Where did all the people go? The view from the dean's office at 30, 000 feet.

Journal of Management Education, 43(3), 304-310.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562919829167

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Tenuto, P. L., Gardiner, M. E., & Yamamoto, J. K. (2016). Leaders on the front line - managing

emotion for ethical decision making: A teaching case study for supervision of school

personnel. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 19*(3), 11-26.

https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1555458916657123

Thompson, L. L. (2016). *Passing on the legacy*: *How rural community college senior officers*

prepare the next generation of leaders [Doctoral dissertation, University of North Dakota]. ProQuest LLC.

Torain, T. T. (2018). *Ethical decision making: An examination of the impact of emotional intelligence and moral reasoning on school leaders* [Doctoral dissertation, Delaware State University]. ProQuest LLC.

Trent, M. P., & Pollard, D. P. (2019). Implementing ethical decision-making: Strategies for today's community college presidents. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2019*(185), 65-74. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20339

Tyrell, S. (2014). Construction of the mid-level management position. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2014*(166), 21-31. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20098

Uhrich, B., Heggestad, E., & Shanock, L. (2021). Smarts or trait emotional intelligence? The role of trait emotional intelligence in enhancing the relationship between cognitive ability and performance. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal, 24*(1), 23-47. https://doi.org/10.1037/mgr0000112

Université de Genève. (2021). *The Geneva Emotional Competence Test manual v1.0.* https://www.unige.ch/cisa/emotional-competence/home/research-tools/geco/

Vernon, P. A., Petrides, K. V., Bratko, D., & Schermer, J. A. (2008). A behavioral genetic study of trait emotional intelligence. *Emotion, 8*, 635-642.

Waglay, M., Becker, J., & Du Plessis, M. (2020). The role of emotional intelligence and autonomy in transformational leadership: A leader member exchange perspective. SA *Journal of Industrial Psychology, 46*(0), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.

Wild, L. L., Ebbers, L. H., Shelley, M. C., & Gmelch, W. H. (2003). Stress factors and community college deans: The stresses of their role identified. *Community College*

Review, 31(3), 1-23.

Wolverton, M., & Poch, S. (2000). The nexus between academic deans and corporate CEOs: An

opportunity in the making. *The Journal of Leadership Studies, 7*(3), 122-130.

Wong, C. S., & Law, K., S. (2002). The effects of leader and follower emotional intelligence on

performance and attitude: An exploratory study. *The Leadership Quarterly, 13*(3), 243-

274. https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(02)00099-1

Wood, J., & Hilton, A. (2012). Five ethical paradigms for community college leaders: Toward

constructing and considering alternative courses of action in ethical decision making.

Community College Review, 40(3), 196-214. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552112448818

Wrysinski-Guden, C. (2014). How new rural superintendents address administrative demands,

curricular development, and instructional leadership: Facing challenges and improving

learning in their first year. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison].

ProQuest LLC.

Wynn, D., & Williams, C. K. (2012). Principles for conducting critical realist case study research

in information systems. *MIS Quarterly, 36*(3), 787-810.

Yamamura, W. (2018). *California community college instructional deans: Bridges & buffers*

[Doctoral dissertation, University of California]. ProQuest LLC.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research design and methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Yip, J., Côté, S., Stein, D., & Carney, D. R. (2020). Supplemental material for follow your gut?

Emotional intelligence moderates the association between physiologically measured

somatic markers and risk-taking. *Emotion, 20*(3), 462-472.

https://doi.og/10.1037/emo0000561.supp

Yun-Tsan, L., & Ti-Chih, T. (2017). Influence of emotional labor and emotional intelligence on

service sabotage. *Advances in Management, 10*(8), 1-9.

Zachariadis, M., Scott, S., & Barrett, M. (2013). Methodological implications of critical realism for mixed-methods research. *MIS Quarterly, 37*(3), 855-879.

Zeidner (2012). The emotional intelligence, health, and well-being nexus: What have we learned and what have we missed? *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being, 4*(1), 1-30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-0854.2011.01062.x

Zhou, W., Zhu, Z., & Vredenburgh, D. (2020). Emotional intelligence, psychological safety, and team decision-making. *Team Performance Management, 26*(1-2), 123-141. https://doi.org/10.1108/TPM-10-2019-0105

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

Greetings <Name of an Academic Dean>

My name is Katy Brooks, and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I am inviting you to participate in my study which involves an exploration of emotional intelligence in decision-making. This study is a requirement for the fulfillment of a Doctoral Degree in Community College Leadership. Participants for this research are individuals holding the position of academic dean, associate dean, and assistant dean at a community college.

As a participant, you will first complete an emotional intelligence assessment (Geneva Emotional Competence Test). The test will take approximately 50 minutes and will assess your emotional intelligence level. The test is based on short videos, scenarios, and situations occurring at a workplace. Private use of this test costs over $80 but will be provided to you for free as a part of the study. The interpretation of your test results will also be provided to you.

Since I am looking for participants whose overall emotional intelligence scores are within a specific range, the test results will determine your participation in the second phase of the study. If selected, I will invite you to participate in two virtual interviews and will reveal the results of the emotional intelligence test at the end of the final interview. If not selected, I will go over your assessment results and provide you with additional resources on emotional intelligence. Participants' total projected time commitment to complete all phases is approximately 3-4 hours.

Your privacy is of utmost importance; therefore, I will not share the information obtained about you in this study with anyone and will not use it in future research studies. Your identifying information, including your name and the name of your institution, will not be revealed. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you can discontinue your participation at any time.

Thank you for considering participation in this research. If you have any questions, please contact me by email at ebroo005@odu.edu or by phone at 804-664-7949. Please reply to this email to signify your intent to participate in the study explained above. Once I receive your reply, I will follow up with an informed consent form and a link to the emotional intelligence test.

Sincerely,

Ekaterina "Katy" Brooks
Doctoral Candidate, Old Dominion University

APPENDIX B
LETTER ACCOMPANYING CONSENT FORM

Dear, <Name of an Academic Dean>

 Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study on academic deans' emotional intelligence in decision-making. Attached is the Informed Consent Form. This form provides a detailed description of the study, participants' time involvement, risks, benefits, and rights. Please sign it and email it back to me. Once I receive the signed form, I will send you the link to the Geneva Emotional Competence Test.

Best,

Ekaterina "Katy" Brooks
Doctoral Candidate, Old Dominion University

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

PROJECT TITLE: Emotional Intelligence in Difficult Decision-Making: A Multiple-Case Study of Community College Academic Deans

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a study exploring emotional intelligence in decision-making. The goal of this research is to explore the ways community college academic deans draw on emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions. This study is designed to investigate the following:
- The types of difficult decisions academic deans face in their professional roles.
- The ways community college academic deans express emotional intelligence when making difficult decisions.

This study consists of two phases. In the first phase, you will be invited to take the Geneva Emotional Competence Test (GECo). The results of the test will determine your participation in the second phase.

If selected, in the second phase, you will be asked to participate in two web-conferencing interviews. The interview sessions will be audio-recorded solely for the purpose of notetaking. Audio recordings will not be shared publicly nor used for playback during a presentation(s).

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Below is the time required for each of the research activities:
GECo – approximately 50 minutes
Interviews (2) – 50-60 minutes each

RISKS AND BENEFITS: Since this study explores emotional intelligence, minor stress caused by answering questions could occur. There is also a minimal risk that first-phase participants who receive low scores on the emotional intelligence assessment may experience psychological discomfort when the assessment results are revealed. Additionally, although appropriate measures will be taken to protect participants' privacy, there is a risk of losing confidentiality due to the use of technology and communication over the Internet. The participants may benefit from taking the emotional intelligence assessment and learning about their emotional intelligence level. Such knowledge may be beneficial if they want to further develop their emotional intelligence skills.

PAYMENTS: You will receive no monetary compensation as payment for your participation.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate or discontinue your participation at any time without any penalty. You also have a right to refuse to answer particular questions.

The results of this research will be presented in a doctoral dissertation and possible academic publications/presentations. Your privacy will be protected, and the information obtained about you in this study will not be shared unless disclosure is required by law. The collected

information will not be used in future research studies.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks, and benefits, contact the Principal Investigator of this research, Dr. David Ayers, at dayers@odu.edu.

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact any one of the individuals listed below:

Dr. Adam Rubenstein
Assistant Vice President for Research Compliance
Old Dominion University
(757) 683-3686
arubenst@odu.edu

Dr. John Baaki
Chair of the Human Subjects Committee
Darden College of Education and Professional Studies
Old Dominion University
(757) 683-5491
jbaaki@odu.edu

INFORMED CONSENT PERMISSION:

By signing this form, you are acknowledging that you have read the form and that you give your consent to participate in the study and be audio-recorded during the interviews and/or a focus group.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE: _____
DATE: _____

Print name of participant: _____

APPENDIX D
LETTER WITH GECo TEST LINK

Dear, <Name of an Academic Dean>

      Thank you for submitting the Informed Consent Form. Below is the link to the Geneva Emotional Competence Test. Once you click on the link, a new page will open, and you will see an ID code field that requires a response. Please type "{participant ID code}" in this field.

      <link to GECo>

      Once you type in an ID code, you will be presented with some basic instructions and information about the test. Click "Next" to start the questionnaire. You will be informed when you complete the test, and no other feedback will be displayed. After reviewing the assessment results of all prospective participants, I will inform you if you are selected for participation in the second phase of the study.

Thank you again for your time, and I hope you enjoy the experience!

Katy

APPENDIX E
FOLLOW-UP LETTER CONFIRMING PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND PHASE

Dear, <Name of an Academic Dean>

Thank you for completing the Geneva Emotional Competence Test. Based on the test results, you have been selected to participate in the second phase of my study on emotional intelligence in decision-making. I understand the time constraints of academic deans, and I am grateful for having the opportunity to interview you.

As I shared with you, I am interested in exploring the difficult decisions you have made in your position and the way your emotional intelligence facilitated your decision-making. At this point, I would like to schedule the date and time for the virtual interview. Please provide me with 2-3 dates and times that would work best for you within the next few weeks, and I will do my best to accommodate your request.

Your privacy will be strictly maintained throughout the study. I will not share the information obtained about you in this study with anyone and will not use it in future research studies. Your identifying information, including your name and the name of your institution, will not be revealed. To ensure accuracy and credibility, you will have an opportunity to review segments of the data you provide. Please keep in mind that your participation in this research is voluntary, and you can discontinue your participation at any time.

Thank you so much for taking the time to participate in my study. I am looking forward to meeting you soon.

Sincerely,

Ekaterina "Katy" Brooks
Doctoral Candidate, Old Dominion University

APPENDIX F
FOLLOW-UP LETTER TO THE FIRST-PHASE PARTICIPANTS NOT SELECTED

FOR THE SECOND PHASE

Dear, <Name of an Academic Dean>

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study on academic deans' emotional intelligence in decision-making. Unfortunately, your overall emotional intelligence score did not fall in the specific range required for participation in the second phase of my study; however, I genuinely appreciate the time you took to take the emotional intelligence assessment.

The attached document contains the information on your test results. If you wish, I will be glad to meet with you virtually and go over your results in more detail. If so, please provide me with 2-3 dates and times that would work best for you within the next few weeks, and I will do my best to accommodate your request.

If you are interested in learning more about emotional intelligence, below are a few links that you may find helpful:

- Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations - https://www.eiconsortium.org/
- Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence - https://ycei.org/
- Managing Emotions in Times of Uncertainty & Stress - https://www.coursera.org/learn/managing-emotions-uncertainty-stress

Thank you again. I wish you the best of luck.

Sincerely,

Ekaterina "Katy" Brooks
Doctoral Candidate, Old Dominion University

APPENDIX G
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I. Greeting

II. Thank you again for your willingness to participate in my study and be interviewed today. As you know I am interested in learning more about the way emotional intelligence manifests in decision-making, so today I am going to ask a few questions about the way you make decisions in your professional role. Please remember that if you do not feel comfortable answering a particular question, you can simply ask me to move on to the next question. Participation in this interview is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.

III. First Interview Questions:

1. First, I would like to take a few moments to get to know you and answer some questions that you may have for me. Please tell me about yourself.

    a. How long have you been working in this position?

    b. How did you become an academic dean?

    c. What motivated you to participate in this study?

    d. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

2. What is a "difficult decision" to you?

    a. What makes it challenging?

    b. How are such decisions affecting you, if at all?

    c. How often do you find yourself making such decisions?

3. In which way, if any, does the decision-making in your current role differ from decision-making experiences in your previous positions?

4. What factors do you consider when making difficult decisions?

    a. What do you believe is the most important to you when making such decisions?

    b. What personal and professional risks are involved?

5. What feelings and emotions are involved in making these decisions?

    a. Can you describe them?

    b. How, if at all, do you address your feelings and emotions?

    c. How do you balance your feelings and emotions with data about the situation?

6. How do you go about deciding in these situations?

IV. Thank you so much for your time today. During our next meeting, I would like to learn more about a particularly challenging decision-making situation you have experienced in your professional role. This could be a situation in which you have experienced an internal conflict or conflict of interest. Please take a few moments to reflect on your past, so you are prepared to talk about your experience in that situation.

V. Second Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about the most challenging decision-making situation you have experienced in this administrative role.

       a. When did it happen?

       b. Who were the stakeholders?

       c. What were the options, risks, and/or benefits?

       d. Could you describe the context in more detail?

2. Could you describe in detail your initial reaction to this situation?

       a. How did you feel about the situation?

       b. How did your body react?

       c. What thoughts crossed your mind at that moment?

       d. How did you perceive the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of others?

3. What was it like for you to decide in that situation?

       a. What factors have you considered in making the decision?

       b. Have you shared your thoughts and feelings with anyone? If so, did you find it helpful and why? If not, why not?

       c. How would you compare the experience in making this decision to other decision-making situations?

       d. Looking back, what would you do differently, if anything?

4. Thank you. Now, I would like to take a few moments to go over your GECo test results. {Discuss test results with the participants}.

5. Knowing what you know now about your emotional intelligence level, how do you believe your emotional intelligence skills guide you in making decisions?

     a. What particular emotional intelligence skills stand out in the process of making

decisions?

b. In which ways do you believe emotional intelligence impedes your decision-making?

APPENDIX H
PERMISSION TO USE THE GENEVA EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE TEST

From: **eri-cisa** <eri-cisa@unige.ch>
Date: Wed, Jan 19, 2022 at 5:33 AM
Subject: Re: Brooks, E. Requesting GECo for academic research
To: Katy BROOKS <ebroo005@odu.edu>

Dear Katy,

We approved your request to use the Geneva Emotional Competence Test for research purposes.

I shared with you the English version of the test through Qualtrics, using the following email address:
ebroo005@odu.edu

The GECo should appear in your Qualtrics account under "Shared with me" surveys with the name "OldDominion_GECO English".
You will be able to share the link with all your participants and you will have full access to the data.

Please note that:
1) **You won't be able to make any modification to the survey**.
2) There is an ID field at the beginning: we suggest that you use this field to link the results of the GECo with the other data that you are collecting.
3) Our suggestion is to collect some pilot data before starting the actual data collection.

Refer to the manual for any doubt that you might have. Given the lack of resources we cannot offer technical support, but I will remain available in case something shouldn't work.

Thank you for your interest in the Geneva Emotional Competence Test and best wishes for your study.

Marcello Mortillaro

Marcello Mortillaro, PhD
Head of Applied Research
www.affective-sciences.org/user/mortillaro
Tel: +41 (0)22 379 09 44

Swiss Center for Affective Sciences
University of Geneva
Campus Biotech
9, Ch. des Mines
1202 Geneva

APPENDIX I
ODU IRB APPROVAL

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH

DATE: July 18, 2022

TO: David Ayers, EdD
FROM: Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee

PROJECT TITLE: [1889079-1] Emotional intelligence in difficult decision-making: A multiple case study of community college academic deans

REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact John Baaki at (757) 683-5491 or jbaaki@odu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Old Dominion University Education Human Subjects Review Committee's records.

VITA

Ekaterina Kalinina Brooks
Old Dominion University
Darden College of Education

EDUCATION

Old Dominion University   Norfolk, VA
Doctor of Philosophy, Community College Leadership

East Carolina University   Greenville, NC
Master of Arts, International Studies
Graduate Certificate, Hispanic Studies

Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University   Pyatigorsk, Russia
Bachelor of Arts, Linguistics

HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Brightpoint Community College, Chester, VA
Transfer Coach   5/2023 – present
Adjunct Spanish Instructor   1/2023 – 5/2023

Reynolds Community College, Richmond, VA
Adjunct Spanish Instructor   8/2022 – 12/2022

College of The Albemarle, Elizabeth City, NC
Department Chair, Humanities and Fine Arts   5/2016 – 7/2020
Assistant Professor, Foreign Languages   8/2012 – 7/2020

Tidewater Community College, Virginia Beach, VA
Adjunct Spanish Instructor   8/2011 – 5/2014

East Carolina University, Greenville, NC
Teaching Assistant, Modified Spanish Program   8/2010 – 05/2011
Graduate Assistant, Office of International Affairs   8/2009 – 07/2010