The Role of Strategic Planning in Community Colleges: A Study of the Perceived Benefits of Strategic Planning in Maryland Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

Community colleges spend considerable amount of time and resources on strategic planning. They engage in strategic planning for a variety of reasons ranging from responding to changes in the external environment to increased expectations for accountability from external agencies such as regional accreditation agencies. While there is no shortage of evidence about the involvement of these organizations with strategic planning, very little research exists about the benefits community colleges derive from engaging in strategic planning. This dissertation explores the relationship between strategic planning and perceived institutional benefits in Maryland community colleges.
DEDICATION

To my father, the quintessential civil servant, whose passion was service to country and nation building.
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CHAPTER 1
THE RESEARCH SETTING

Introduction

Community colleges are unique centers of educational opportunity for students from all walks of life. These publicly funded educational institutions began about 100 years ago. In a 100 years’ time they have grown both in number and in the wide array of educational offerings they provide. While each community college is unique, they share the common mission of open access and providing affordable education to a large segment of the American population.

Table 1
Community colleges at a glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>1,167</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>12.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age of students</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average tuition and fees</td>
<td>$2,713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degrees awarded annually</td>
<td>609,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificated awarded annually</td>
<td>323,649</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: American Association of Community Colleges, 2011 Community College Fast Facts

Currently there are 1,167 regionally accredited community colleges in the United States. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, these institutions now enroll over to 12 million credit and non-credit students. It is also worth noting that many of these students would not have had the opportunity to participate in higher education had it not been for
the community colleges. As Brint and Karabel (1989) put it, “community colleges were created to democratize both American higher education and the students who came through their open doors.”

Unlike their four-year counterparts, community colleges accept all students and provide extensive remedial programs, English as a Second Language programs, and many other support services to help their students meet their educational goals. Community colleges offer classes in the evenings and on weekends in addition to daytime hours to serve their many non-traditional students. In Maryland, approximately 50% of the students in higher education attend one of the 16 community colleges in the state.

When community colleges came into the scene of U.S. higher education around a hundred years ago, their mission was providing the first two years of preparation for transfer to a four-year institution. The comprehensive community college concept was introduced in 1947 with the Truman Commission on Higher Education. The comprehensive Community colleges were expected to “meet the total post high-school needs of the community” (Bogart, 1974, P.62). Supporters of the community college movement saw this expanded mission as a natural outgrowth of being community based. While the community colleges support the expanded mission, criticisms based on economic and social reasons have surfaced over the years.

Today not only are community colleges significant players in American higher education, they also play a significant role in the workforce and economic development arenas. Until recently, most good jobs required only a high school diploma. Over the years, the minimum requirement for such jobs has changed to include some sort of post high school education and training. This change in minimum requirements has caused a large segment of the population to turn to community colleges for further education and job training. Local employers as well as
those who are already in the labor force have also turned to the community colleges for their training needs. Community colleges constantly reassess their program offerings to make sure that what they are offering meets the demands of both students and employers. They also collaborate with the business community to stimulate the economy and create employment. Recently, President Obama has emphasized the central role of community colleges in the administration’s workforce development and economic recovery programs. Community colleges are lauded for their ability to respond quickly to workforce development needs.

Community colleges have become an integral part American higher education. The American public holds highly favorable attitudes toward community colleges. A recent survey (Belden & Stewart, 2004) found that over half the members of the public say they have taken classes at a community college or graduated from one. Strong majorities of the American public say these institutions provide a good education and good job training at affordable prices and in convenient locations.

Since their inception, over a hundred years ago to where they are today, the sources of financial support for the community colleges have changed significantly. According to Cohen and Brower (1996), around the time community colleges came on the American higher education scene 94 percent of their support came from local funds. Currently community colleges rely on state support, tuition, and fees for 65 percent of their budgets. Over the years, the environment in which these institutions operate has changed significantly presenting several challenges that they have to deal with.

Even though Community colleges are well known for their efficiency and cost effectiveness, the recent state budget shortfalls is affecting community colleges around the
country. Community colleges are dealing with budget reductions that threaten their ability to meet their mission mandates. The challenge of doing more with less has increasingly become a way of life for these institutions. While enrollments at community colleges have grown dramatically over the years, the resources needed to provide the services have not kept the same pace with the demand for services. Rather, community colleges find themselves dealing with drastic budget cuts. Budget cuts are particularly tough on community colleges because about 65 percent of their operating funds come from state and local resources. By contrast, public four-year institutions rely on state and local funds for only about 30 percent of their operating budgets. Community colleges are also more reluctant to raise tuition than four-year public institutions because of the centrality of accessibility in their mission.

Demographic changes are another challenge faced by community colleges. Their open-door admissions policies and their affordable tuition make community colleges attractive to a major segment of the college-going population. The growing student population that is drawn to the community colleges is getting more diverse in terms of both age and ethnicity.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), almost half of the students in public two-year institutions are 18-24 years old. Almost a third of the student population is 30 or older. Minority students make up almost one third of the student population in community colleges. One in four students attending community colleges is an immigrant student. Currently, English as a Second Language programs are the largest and fastest growing programs at community colleges. Meeting the needs of a growing group of non-traditional students is a major challenge community colleges have to contend with.

Since their inception over a hundred years ago, community colleges have focused on providing central accessible and affordable education. Their mission of access and affordability
has, over the years, led to dramatic increases in both programmatic offerings and enrollment. While community colleges still embrace the value of accessibility, accountability has taken a central place in the operation of these institutions.

Legislators, the public and accrediting agencies are demanding that community colleges demonstrate they are good stewards of taxpayer funds measured in terms of graduating and retraining students. Higher education accountability has become part of statewide government reform efforts. Some have described the current emphasis on accountability the “reinventing government” effect (Ruppert, 2003) Given the rising cost of higher education and the limited resources that have to be shared with competing demands, the current interest in accountability in higher education is easy to understand. Accountability is another major challenge community colleges have to manage effectively.

As a way of dealing with the challenges described above, community colleges like other public organizations have turned to management tools developed in the business. One such tool that is widely used by higher education institutions including community colleges is strategic planning.

Over the years, the application of strategic planning in institutions of higher education has been seen as a tool for improvement and change in these organizations. Among other things, strategic planning is seen as a process that would help institutions of higher education think and act strategically and chart out well thought out future directions. Not only is the process seen as vehicle that helps institutions define future directions, it is also used to determine the resources needed to achieve future goals and objectives.
Higher education scholars (Cope 1987; Keller 1993; Glaister and Falshaw 1999; Ward 2009) suggest that colleges and universities should implement strategic planning to deal with the effects of the major challenges such as the ones discussed above. Changing environmental conditions also play a significant role in prompting these organizations to engage in strategic planning. Writers such as Anderson (2000), and Crittenden and Crittenden (2000) whose work has focused on changing environmental conditions argue that all large organizations need planning processes to increase their chances of meeting their organizational goals.

On the other hand, the value of strategic planning has been questioned (Mintzberg 1994, Bryson 1995). These writers, among other things, argue that the process of strategic planning is too restrictive and stifles organizational creativity. Others have suggested that there is little evidence that engaging in strategic planning results in better decision making and organizational foresight (Mulhare, 1999). Some have argued that strategic planning should not be undertaken because it takes too much time and organizational resources (Mara, 2000).

Despite the argument made against strategic planning, higher education institutions around the country and community colleges in Maryland continue to engage in the strategic planning process. These organizations spend significant human, financial, and technical resources on strategic planning. Within these organizations, there is an underlying assumption that strategic planning is important and engaging in strategic planning is seen as a way of managing change thereby, enhancing their ability to manage the environments in which they operate.

Although the potential benefits of engaging in strategic planning are alluded to in the higher education literature and community colleges continue to engage in some form of a
strategic planning process, the benefits of strategic planning in these public organizations has not been fully studied. How does engaging in strategic planning help community colleges? Does strategic planning help community colleges become proactive and better adapt to environmental changes? Does it help them better understand their priorities? Does it help them figure out what new things they should be doing? Does engaging in strategic planning promote strategic thought and action in these public organizations? Does it enhance decision-making? Very limited information is currently available on the benefits of strategic planning in community colleges.

The purpose of the current study is to explore strategic planning as practiced by community colleges in Maryland and understand how study participants perceive the benefits of strategic planning in community colleges in Maryland. The dissertation focuses on strategic planning and its perceived benefits. The study participants are involved in strategic planning in their respective organizations and they understand that planning is a complex process that has to be carried out effectively in order to reap its benefits.

The main objective of the research is to understand the benefits community colleges in Maryland derive by undertaking strategic planning. The literature has identified several benefits of strategic planning ranging from fostering strategic thinking and acting to improved communication. What is actually found at the community colleges will be compared with the benefits of strategic planning identified in the literature.

The research will review literature in four major areas: strategic planning, strategic planning in public organizations, strategic planning in higher education and the impact of strategic planning. The information gathered from the literature will guide the development of the survey instrument that will be used to collect data from community college leaders in
Maryland. In addition to the survey, interviews with a sample of Anne Arundel Community College administrators, members of the Intuitional Assessment Team, and members of the Strategic Planning Council will be carried out to understand the link between strategic planning and performance. The essence of the research is captured in figure 1.

![Figure 1 Key components of the study](image_url)

The dissertation is made up of five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the research setting and identifies the importance of the research and its contribution to public administration. The review of the significant literature covered for the study is presented in chapter 2. Chapter 3 covers the methodological approach for the study. The results of the data collection are presented in chapter 4. The chapter discusses statistical analysis and displays the data analysis results. Chapter 5 presents the summary of the study.
Purpose of the Study

The business world has been using strategic planning for several years and it is a well-established management tool in the sector. The benefits of engaging in strategic planning are well documented in the literature. While the use of strategic planning does not have a long history in public organizations, writers have suggested that public organizations that engage in strategic planning should expect to garner similar benefits experienced in the business world. Perhaps this is the most compelling reason that has encouraged higher education institutions to take on the practice.

A significant part of US higher education is covered by community colleges. Currently these public organizations enroll half of all the students in US higher education. Over the last decade and a half, these institutions have faced several obstacles and challenges ranging from growing demand for their services to dwindling financial resources. These challenges coupled with a growing accountability movement and a call for efficiency have prompted community college leaders to turn to established management tools such as strategic planning as a way of coping with the turbulent environment in which they find themselves in.

The purpose of this study is to understand how survey participants assess the benefits of strategic planning in community colleges in Maryland. The research attempts to show the benefits of strategic planning as perceived by community college personnel in Maryland.

Statement of the Problem

While strategic planning has a long track record in business and industry, its introduction to higher education dates back only to the 1950s. As the literature suggests, the initial focus of
strategic planning in higher education was on facilities and space planning. Given this short history of strategic planning in higher education in general and community colleges in particular, the available empirical research focusing on the benefits of strategic planning and higher education is very limited. The present study is intended to fill this void.

In particular, the study is designed to understand what benefits community colleges in Maryland derive from developing and implementing strategic plans. The following questions were developed after a thorough review of the literature to guide the study.

1. Does strategic planning promote strategic thinking and acting?
2. Does strategic planning lead to a better understanding of the college?
3. Does strategic planning enhance teamwork?
4. Does strategic planning improve communication?
5. Does strategic planning improve institutional performance?

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The focus of this research is the public community colleges in Maryland. The colleges have formalized strategic planning processes including setting goals and objectives and establishing a mechanism for evaluating the plan.

Information for the study is collected through a survey instrument adopted from a similar study. The study relies upon responses from college leaders, planning committee members, individuals who are involved in the strategic planning process at these institutions. The sixteen public community colleges in Maryland make up the study group.
Definition of Terms

Strategic Planning

While there are several definitions of strategic planning, significant unifying views are found in the definitions. These include future orientation, reliance on information gathering, and the consideration of alternative courses of action. Norris and Poulton (1991) define strategic planning as “the activity through which one confronts the major strategic decisions facing the organization.”

Bryson, drawing on Olsen and Eddie (1982) defines strategic planning as “a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it.”

Community College

Community college is a two-year college that prepares students for careers and for transfer to four-year institutions.

Significance of the Study

Higher education institutions including community colleges are engaged in developing and implementing strategic plans. The Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) web page, for example, has strategic plans from over 600 institutions. Strategic planning methods at first developed for the private sector, are widely adopted by public organizations including higher education institutions. Community colleges are in the midst of increased fiscal austerity, greater demand for accountability, and an ever-increasing demand for their services. Given these
pressures, community colleges have turned to strategic planning as a tool that will help them become more responsive to the pressures. While there is plenty of evidence that shows the wide use of strategic planning by community colleges, very little is known about the benefits these institutions derive from strategic planning in the operation of these organizations.

While the literature identifies several benefits associated with strategic planning, the ultimate goal of strategic planning is enhanced organizational performance. The majority of the empirical work that attempted to link strategic planning and performance is conducted with business organizations as the focus. This research study will enrich our knowledge and understanding of the benefits of strategic planning on a particular type of public organization, community colleges.

The current study is significant in that it will provide community college decision makers with crucial information that could help them develop effective strategic plans.
CHAPTER 2

THE REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature that has direct relevance to the present research includes the body of work on strategic planning in the private sector, strategic planning in public non-profit organizations, literature on strategic planning in higher education, and the literature that specifically deals with the benefits of strategic planning. The literature on strategic planning in higher education is of particular importance because it goes directly to the question of applying strategic planning a management tool widely used in the private sector to public organizations such as community colleges. To get a fuller understanding of strategic planning it will be traced to its origins and followed to its current adoption by public organizations including community colleges that are the focus of this research.

Strategic Planning in the Private Sector

While strategic planning dates back to ancient military times, strategic planning, as it is practiced today in private sector organizations is a very recent phenomenon. Some trace the origins of strategic planning for business to the 1920s with the development of Harvard’s Policy model (Amin 2011). According to Steiner (1979), the concept of strategic planning was first introduced in the business sector in the late 1950s and was referred to as long term planning. According to Mintzberg (1994), strategic planning goes back to the mid-1960s. Mintzberg (1994) suggests formalized strategic planning evolved from budgeting exercises in the United States in the 1950s and spread rapidly to the corporate world. By the mid-1960s and throughout the 1970s, large corporations were engaged in some form of strategic planning. Yet others
(Rosenberg and Schewe, 1985) have suggested the 1970s as the period when strategic plan came on the scene.

These writers suggest that the uncertain and fast changing environment of the 1970s forced business leaders to look for an appropriate management tool to deal with the ever-changing environment. Strategic planning advocates who wrote in the 60’s Chandler (1962) and Ansoff (1965) were mainly focused on long-term strategy. They were mainly interested in predicting the future and controlling the surprise factor associated with the external environment. Understanding and managing the external environment was, and still is, an integral part of Strategic Planning.

The purpose of strategic planning in the business world is to pave the way for the organization to be more efficient and take advantage of the attributes that gives it a comparative advantage over the competition. The goal is to take advantage of these attributes and develop actions that will help achieve organizational goals. Over the years, two schools of thought have guided the thinking about how one firm distinguishes itself from another and develops an edge over it.

The first focuses on the external environment. According to this school of thought, a firm’s competitive advantage is a function of the external environment (Porter 1980, 1985). Given this external focus, managers who develop actions around adapting to the external environment lead their firms on a successful route. A contending view suggests that what gives a firm the competitive advantage is its internal makeup (Barney, 1991). Thus, in this inward focus on the firm approach leaders build on the internal attribute of the firm as a way of excelling and developing competitive advantage and superiority.
Managers in the corporate world saw strategic planning as a way of creating a better fit between the organization and the external environment. Faced with the reality of an increasingly changing environment, managers saw strategic planning as a way of getting a better handle on the environment while at the same time meeting organizational objectives.

The literature has also described strategic planning as an effort to establish commonly shared objectives and developing strategies to achieve the objectives. Steiner (1979, p. 15) defines “strategic planning is the systemic and more or less formalized effort of a company to establish basic company purposes, objectives, policies and strategies to develop detailed plans to implement policies and strategies to achieve objectives and basic company purposes.” Steiner’s definition is not future oriented. In his approach, strategic planning offers a way of looking at alternatives to make current decisions.

Nut and Backoff (1992, p. 57) offer the following definition. “… decisions an organization makes that determine or reveal its objectives, purposes, or goals; create the principal policies and plans for achieving its aims; define the range of businesses or services the organization is to pursue; identify the kind of economic and human organization it is and it intends to be.” Backoff’s definition of strategic planning is future oriented and includes the common notions of mission and vision and objectives.

Ackoff (1981, p.62) defines strategic planning as “the design of a desirable future and the invention of ways to bring it about.” Bryan Barry (1997, p.5) defines strategic planning as “what an organization intends to achieve and, secondly, how leadership within an organization will direct or utilize its resources to achieve its ends.”

While Bryson’s work is associated mainly with the non-profits, the definition he offers “a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and
define what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it” (Bryson, 2010) applies equally to private sector organizations. Bryson’s definition encompasses the notions of mission, goals and values. He suggests that strategic planning is an important tool for organizations to deal with “the wrenching changes many have experienced in recent years”. Strategic planning, as Bryson suggest, helps organizations think and act strategically. According to Bryson, the main purpose of strategic planning is to create within the organization the capacity to think and act strategically.

While the definitions offered by the various writers are different, they share several common concepts. Some of the common concepts that run across the various definitions include the development of a common vision for the future or where does the organization want to be in the long-term. Mission is another common concept commonly shared by the definitions. Developing the strategies or how the organization will get to the desired future is another common concept present in the definitions. Finally, all the definitions allude to the concept of evaluating the progress made towards organizational goal achievement.

At the fundamental level, strategic planning involves establishing goals and objectives for the organization and identifying strategies or the hows to achieve the established goal. Over the years, strategic planning has evolved and taken several forms.

There are as many reasons as there are plans for why organizations engage in strategic planning. Typically, strategic planning is viewed as an avenue for establishing desired directions for the organization. Barry (1986) Nutt and Backoff (1992) suggest that through strategic planning, limited resources can be allocated among competing directions in order to maximize benefits to stakeholders.
McNamara (1999) argues that strategic planning serves a variety of purposes in the organization. Among these, include defining the purpose of the organization and establishing realistic goals and objectives, communicating the established goals and objectives throughout the organization, ensuring efficient use of resources, increasing productivity from increased efficiency and effectiveness, and solving major problems.

Over the years, several models of strategic planning have been developed by practitioners. Among these, include the SWOT model that is based on identifying the organizations internal strengths and weaknesses and threats and opportunities of the external environment. SWOT’s objective is to offer organizational strategies that ensure the best fit between the organization’s external environment and internal situation (Hax & Majluf, 1996, p.27).

Another model, developed by Ansoff, employs the concept of gap analysis to determine the difference between the organization’s current position and where it wants to be. The organization uses the strategy that closes the gap (Mintzberg 1994).

Porter’s five forces model is another model widely used in private sector strategic planning. Porter’s model was developed to guide the analysis of the organization’s environment and attractiveness of the industry. What Porter calls five forces include risk of new competitors, the threat of potential substitutes, power of buyers, power of sellers, and the rivalry between competitors. The impact of the five forces is effectively anticipated through a SWOT analysis and managed by choosing the appropriate strategy (Porter 1985).
The literature suggests that no one model is completely exceptional to another. The models are not presented as a solution to all organizational problems. Organizations that are engaged in strategic planning adapt a process that works best for them.

There is a body of work in the strategic planning literature that strongly advocates strategic planning as the key to superior organizational performance. Writers in this vein argue that it is an extremely important tool for organizational effectiveness (Keller 1983; Mintzberg 1994; Cope, 1987; Bryson, 1995, ). Others argue that strategic planning can help organizations chart a desirable future direction, develop a systematic basis for the decision-making process, establish priorities, improve organizational performance and, overall, think strategically (Bryson 1988; Ansoff and McDonnell, 1990). The argument made by these writers clearly implies that institutions that engage in strategic planning and correctly implement strategic plans are more likely to be successful.

Several studies that looked at small and medium sized enterprises found that strategic planning is a common practice in those that are better performers. Higher sales growth, better margins of profit, and higher returns on assets were observed in firms that were engaged in strategic planning (Carland &Carland 2003; Gibson & Casser 2005).

Other studies have found that firms that engage in strategic planning tend to be more innovative, are more likely to use innovative management processes, use new technology (Stewart 2002; Gibson & O’Connor 2005).

Recently the value of strategic planning has been questioned (Mintzberg, 1994; Desai, 2000; Mulhare, 1999). These writers have gone as far as suggesting that strategic planning has lost its once dominant standing in the private sector. Further, the argument is made that strategic planning is too restrictive making organizational adaptability impossible (Mintzberg 1994).
Mulhare (1999) further argues that the evidence that shows strategic planning’s contribution to better decision making is non-existent. Mara (2000) makes the point that strategic planning is a very time consuming endeavor and it takes many resources to undertake.

Henry Mintzberg (1994) argued that business had an often-counterproductive experience with planning from the 1960s through the 1980s. He gives examples of several large companies that had negative experiences with large scale formal strategic planning. According to Mintzberg (1993), one of the major weaknesses of strategic planning has to do with the processes inability to produce effective strategies. Mintzberg argues strategic planning cannot produce strategies because it is a formalized and programmatic process. He goes on to claim “we have no evidence that any of the strategic planning system, no matter how elaborate, succeeded in capturing the messy informal processes by which strategies really get developed” (1994,p.296). Mintzberg continued, “take apart any model of strategic planning, box, by box, and at the heart of the process where strategies are supposed to be created, you will find only a set of empty platitudes, not any simulation of complex managerial processes” (p.297).

Mintzberg suggests that the concept of strategic planning is based on three fallacies. The first fallacy is that of prediction. This fallacy, according to Mintzberg, leads to the wrong belief that planners can predict what will happen in the organizations environment. The second fallacy is the notion that planners who for the most part are detached from the realities of the environmental context can produce effective strategies. The last fallacy is that of formalization. Mintzberg argues that formalized procedures cannot produce strategies. Rather they are better fit to operationalize already existing strategies.

Others have gone as far as arguing that strategic planning should be scrapped completely and replaced with strategic thinking (Harari 1995). These critiques question both the prominence
of strategic planning and the promise associated with it. Frank Schmidtlein has criticized the effectiveness of formal planning practices (Schmidtlein 1990; Schmidtlein & Milton 1990).

Strategic planning has come a long way since the 1990s. In the early days of strategic planning the focus of strategic planning was on predicting the future and minimizing surprises associated with the unknown. While understanding and managing the external environment remains an integral part of strategic planning, there is less emphasis on the rational approach to strategic planning. Writers such as (Bryson, 1995) point out past attempts at improving decision making were based on the wrong notion of imposing “formal rationality “ on “systems that are not rational”. Currently there is greater emphasis on understanding the cultural and political dynamics that underlie public organizations. This acknowledges the fact that whether the final product is a policy or a program it is a result of a lot of give and take among the various interested parties and not the result of some pre-determined formula.

In addition, there is a lot of emphasis on learning and becoming creative. Writers such as Wilson (2004) suggest that strategic planning has evolved into a system of strategic thinking. The argument here is the “real purpose of strategic planning is to improve strategic thinking” (Heracleous, 2003). Given this view, the tools of strategic planning are nothing but a means to an end, which is creative thinking. Bryson argues that “indeed if any particular approach to strategic planning gets in the way of strategic thought and action, that planning approach should be scrapped” (Bryson, 1995, p 3.).

Another shift from the earlier days of strategic planning is the focus on implementation. The argument here is the purpose of planning is not merely to plan but to make changes. Writers who suggest the shift (Noble, 1999) argue that there has been an over emphasis on strategy
formulation with very little or no focus on implementation. Some of the benefits associated with strategic planning may in fact be the result of good implementation.

Karl Moore (2011) argues that the world in which deliberate strategy worked is no longer here. The current environment is not conducive to traditional strategic planning where a group of planners sit in a room and come up with the strategic plan that will guide the organization for the next five years. The appropriate approach is what Moore calls “emergent strategy”.

According to Moore emergent strategy is” the view that strategy emerges over time as intentions collide with and accommodate a changing reality”. Emergent strategy is a set of actions, or behavior, consistent over time, “a realized pattern [that] was not expressly intended in the original planning of strategy. (Moore,2011). The implication here is an organization is learning what works in practice. Moore argues, given the current environment organizations operate in, the emergent strategy approach is more relevant. He suggests planning is useful in instances where long term thinking is appropriate.

Despite the criticism and the problems identified with the tool, strategic planning continues to be used in both the private and public sectors. There is continued interest in strategic planning as a tool to monitor the changing external environment and prepare for it accordingly. The literature suggests organizations can benefit from engaging in strategic planning. The literature also points out that over the years there has been a fundamental change in how organizations approach strategic planning. Making strategic planning flexible to allow innovation and accommodate change is part of the evolution of strategic planning (Grant, 2005).

Strategic Planning in Public Organizations

Managers in the public sector including community college administrators are more and more operating in an environment that demands efficiency and effectiveness. In the case of the
community colleges for example, governing boards and state higher education commissions argue that limited resources coupled with the public demand for accountability leave them no choice but to operate these public organizations as if they were business enterprises where the bottom line drives everything. In order to address this growing demand for efficiency and effectiveness managers in the public sector have turned to tools developed in the private sector. Strategic planning is one of the many tools public sector managers have turned to help them become efficient and at the same time respond to the growing call for accountability (Borins, 2011; Hendrick, 2010).

Strategic planning in the public sector for the most part emulates what is done in the business world and dates back to the late 1950s and early 1960s. During this time, Planning, Programming Budgeting Systems (PPBS) was introduced in the Department of Defense (Jenkins, 1978; Downs & Larkey 1986). The reason the U.S. Department of Defense turned to PPBS was to plan for the future and also to cut operational costs. As Young (2001) puts it, “PPBS promised to do several things to improve federal governmental operations. Some of these anticipated improvements included: establishing long-range planning goals and objectives; examining the costs and benefits of these expected ends; comparing and contrasting alternative activities to achieve agency goals and objectives; and, establishing multi-year projections for both executive and legislative consideration when considering annual budgets and appropriations”.

The use of PPBS was not limited to DOD. Eventually, PPBS was implemented throughout the U.S. government. At the time, some critics of PPBS argued that federal agencies did not have the capacity for strategic planning (Wildavsky, 1969). Following PPBS, the U.S. federal government adopted Management by Objectives (MBO), Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB).
The 1980’s marked the beginning of implementing reforms designed to make public organizations more efficient, productive, responsive, and performance based. Total quality management, for example, was adopted by public agencies with performance in mind. A flurry of other private sector management practices were adopted believing that what works for the private sector would also work for public organizations. Strategic planning is one of the many management tools adopted by public organizations in the 1980s.

In August 1993, Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act. Under GPRA, leadership in the public sector was legally obligated to address issues such as performance planning and management. The idea behind GPRA was the improvement of performance in federal agencies. Federal agency managers were given more discretion over the use of resources while at the same time being required to show more accountability. To be effective, public managers were expected to develop strategies that align the resources, outputs, and tasks of the organization with the needs of the society.

A number of strategic planning initiatives were recently introduced by the Obama Administration. Among these, include the Citizen’s Briefing Book and open government consultation. The idea behind the Citizen’s Briefing Book was to use online tools to open up the input process to a wider segment of the population. The Briefing Book web site was visited by 125,000 individuals, and close to 45,000 ideas were submitted. (Borins, 2010)

Strategic planning has been “one of the hot innovations in public administration, promising public agencies the benefits of a rational and highly structured, and future oriented management technique taken directly from the best-run business corporations” (Berry and Wechsler, 1995). According to Wechsler (1989), increasing number of government agencies has adopted some form of strategic planning. While strategic planning has been questioned by
several writers (Mintzberg 1994; Bryson and Roering, 1987; the literature makes a compelling argument that organizations that take part in strategic planning activities do indeed benefit from it (Bryson, 2010; Nutt & Backoff, 1992). These writers recommend strategic planning as an effective tool for improving organizational decision-making and performance in government.

While formal strategic planning methods initially developed for the private sector have been adopted by public organizations, those who push the use of strategic planning suggest that the methods be adapted to fit the unique contexts of public sector organizations. For example, John Bryson (1995) suggests that his approach to strategic planning takes into account the fact that multiple interests influence decision-making in public organizations.

Bryson’s model specifically addresses public and nonprofit organizations. Bryson’s eight-step process model is summarized in table 2.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bryson’s eight-step strategic planning process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Identifying organizational mandates</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Clarifying organizational mission and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Assessing the external environment: opportunities and threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Assessing the internal environment: strengths and weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Identifying the strategic issues facing an organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Formulating strategies to manage the issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Establishing an effective organizational vision for the future</td>
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</table>

Source: John M. Bryson Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations

Bryson’s model starts out by laying out the general framework for the planning process. This includes identifying key players and reaching an agreement on how to proceed with
planning. This step provides an understanding of what the strategic planning looks like and lays out the potential value of strategic planning to the organization.

Agreeing on mission and values is an important step in Bryson’s model. Bryson suggests since mission and values guide the organization, it is important to clarify the organizational mission and values. This establishes the necessary consensus on why the organization exists.

Carrying out an internal and external environmental scanning is another important process in Bryson’s model. The main purpose of carrying out the environmental assessment is to understand how the organization interacts with the environment it operates in. The external scan helps identify the opportunities and threats in the external environment while the internal assessment helps the organization determine its strengths and weaknesses.

Identifying strategic issues and formulating strategies to manage the issues are related steps in Bryson’s eight-step model. According to Bryson, strategic issues always arise during the strategic planning process and involve conflict. “The conflict may involve ends (what); means (how); philosophy (why); location (where); and the groups that might be affected by different ways of resolving the issue (who).” The important point here is if the organization cannot do “anything about it, it is not an issue for the organization.” Once the issues are identified, the next step in the model is developing strategies to manage the issues.

All the planning models examined share similar factors. The models feature an external and internal environmental scanning component. The development of vision and mission is another common feature of all the models. Goal development is discussed in all the models. After goals are developed, the models move to the development of strategies and action plans.

The Bryson approach to strategic planning has several attributes that makes it adaptive to public organizations. Public organizations are not only complex but are also subjected to many
external societal forces. Given this, the planning approach has to be participatory to accommodate the interests of multiple stakeholders. Bryson’s approach to strategic planning has several elements previously suggested by writers including (Eadie, 1982; Mintzberg, 1994 and Schein, 1992). Each step of the process is very crucial in that it covers important realities that are associated with public organizations. In step one, for example, Bryson suggests that it is important to bring all key decision makers to the table and agree on a process. This is where buy in is achieved. Given this, it is important to have all key stakeholders at the table.

Step two of the Bryson approach specifies that all organizational mandates relating to the organization be recognized. This is particularly important for public organizations because it recognizes the fact that public organizations are a creation of statutes and some constitutional provision of the law. Since the organization’s governance its functions and mandates are spelled out by law, Bryson suggests that those charged with the planning process should have a clear understanding of all the political and other nuances and take them into consideration when developing the plan. In short, Bryson suggests that in order for the plan to work it has to have a clear sense of the uniqueness of public organizations.

As Bryson puts it, “strategic planning is now a ubiquitous practice in U.S. governments and nonprofit organizations (Bryson, 2010). ” Its usefulness at various level of government has been documented by several studies (Poister and Streib 2005; Pitt and Edwards 2010; Bryson 2010). What does the future for strategic planning looks like? In a recent article that appeared in Public Administration Review Bryson offers eight predictions about the future of strategic planning practice and research.

First, Bryson predicts that the need for public and nonprofit organizations to think, act and learn strategically will increase. The growing need for strategic thinking and acting is
necessitated by the rapid pace of change that is currently taking place in the environment in which public and nonprofit organizations operate in. The new market dynamics, the global economy, advances in technology, increased societal demands for public service, and the new reality of providing public services with less are among the changes identified by Bryson. Public and nonprofit organizations have to think and act strategically to perform effectively.

Bryson’s second prediction suggests that strategic planning approaches will change. The new approach to strategic planning will focus on understanding what works and why. This new approach will force public and nonprofit organizations to understand the changes that are needed, and develop approaches to implement and manage the changes. The new approach will emphasize on matching perceived challenges with specific aspects of strategic planning. This approach to strategic planning will lead to more collaboration between academics and practitioners of strategic planning to develop approaches that are practical and useful. The significant challenge will be coming up with a strategic planning process that enhances strategic thinking and acting.

Bryson’s third prediction revolves around the level of involvement in strategic planning. Although involvement in strategic planning has been a topic of many writers in the past (Fiegener, 2005; Nutt and Backoff 1992; Bryson; 1995), Bryson takes involvement a little further and suggests a broader level of involvement. Bryson predicts there will be more demand for inter organizational cooperation. Bryson suggests this level of involvement in strategic planning is inevitable because the challenges public organizations have to deal with more and more call for the involvement of more than one organization. For example, dealing with natural disasters involves the cooperation of several organizations with varying degrees of expertise. Strategic planning will be characterized by approaches that are more inclusive.
As a fourth prediction, Bryson proposes that strategic planning will become more analytical. Strategic planning methods will incorporate features that include analysis and synthesis of information as part of the strategic planning process. This will involve a much more focused analysis of the environment and incorporating the analysis in the strategic planning process. Bryson suggests the creation of possible future scenarios that can impact the organization will become a common approach in strategic planning. The approach will be more forward looking and based on what ifs to prepare the organization to deal with unexpected changes.

The fifth prediction argues that given the emphasis on inclusion, analysis that will be commonplace in future strategic planning, coming up with fast responses to challenges will be difficult. In this scenario, while strategic planning benefits from the increased participation of several actors and a rigorous and robust analysis, it comes at the expense of speedy responses to the challenges of the day.

Bryson also predicts that strategic planning will be more clear about what approach works, when and why. He argues that the existing “public strategy typologies” and the ones that will result from the increased cooperation of researcher and strategic planning practitioners will provide a tool box from which public managers can pick the appropriate tool to deal with the given challenge.

As the seventh prediction, Bryson argues that as the pressure on public organizations for effectiveness and efficiency increases, the alignment of strategic issues will become a major feature of strategic planning. With strategic alignment, public and nonprofit organizations can improve performance by eliminating redundancy and properly aligning the organization to the
external environment. Strategic alignment can benefit organizations by integrating different functions and resources across the organization.

The final prediction Bryson makes about the future of strategic planning in public and nonprofit organizations states that there will be an emphasis on integrating strategic planning, budgeting, and performance management. Bryson argues that integrating budgeting and performance with the strategic planning process results in a coherent process that could potentially increase organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Bryson also suggests that establishing a clear linkage among strategic planning, budgeting and performance management enhances cooperation, communication and collaboration.

In addition to Bryson’s predictions about the future of strategic planning, there is a call for some fundamental changes in the practice if it strategic planning is to remain relevant in public and nonprofit organizations in the years to come (Poister 2010; Plant 2010).

Poister (2010) argues that to make strategic planning remain a relevant and useful tool for public managers a fundamental shift from strategic planning to strategic management has to take place. He argues there is a need to holistically manage the strategic planning process on an ongoing basis. Further, Poister suggests achieving organizational goals will require a shift in practice that includes less focus on performance measurement and more emphasis on managing performance.

Others have argued (Plant 2010; Poister 2010) that there is a fundamental need to link strategic planning to the budgeting process so that initiatives that are in line with organizations mission are funded effectively. Plant also suggests that while public organizations have become less bureaucratic and more horizontally integrated in recent years, strategic planning as practiced in public organizations remains a top down process. He goes on to suggest that strategic planning
has to involve a broader segment of the organization to achieve enhancement in overall performance and meet organizational goals.

Strategic Planning in Higher Education

American higher education over the past fifty years has been characterized by growth and innovation. Colleges and universities, including community colleges, have made higher education accessible to a large segment of the U.S. population while at the same time making significant contribution to research and development that fueled the growth of the economy.

The recent history of U.S. higher education, however, is marked with less funding from the government, increased demand for accountability, growth in regulations, and growing public skepticism about the return on investment in higher education. While a record number of a diverse student population is entering higher education, the resources needed to meet the educational demands of the growing population have not grown accordingly. The changed environment in which higher education operates and the challenges associated with the changing environment has forced them to look for tools that will help them manage and adapt to the changed environment. One management tool higher education institutions have adopted is strategic planning.

Higher education’s involvement with strategic planning is a very recent. Higher education’s initial involvement with strategic planning was primarily focused on planning for campus facilities and infrastructure. The main driver for this was the rapid expansion of higher education during this period. The rapid expansion during this period was driven by several factors including the passage of government acts specifically designed to enhance American higher education. For example, Title II of the National Defense Education act of 1958 passed by
congress in response to President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s special message to Congress to take emergency action to provide funds to promote education in math science and foreign language field. The program helped thousands of students to enroll in institutions of higher education around the country.

Table 2-1

Periods in higher education strategic planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Driving force</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950s and early 60s</td>
<td>Campus facilities</td>
<td>High Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960’s and early 1970’s</td>
<td>Financial and resource planning</td>
<td>Leveling enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid 1970’s</td>
<td>Enrollment Planning</td>
<td>Enrollment demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early 1980’s</td>
<td>Forecasting</td>
<td>leveled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic program Planning</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990’s</td>
<td>New business practices, quality</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000’s</td>
<td>Performance measurement</td>
<td>Accreditors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Governing boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Public</td>
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</table>

Institutions were growing in size and their operations were growing more complex. According to Holmes (1985), the first formal meeting of higher education planners first took place in 1959.
Those who took part in this meeting were for the most part facilities planners. Eventually this group of planners formed the Society for College and University Planning in 1966. The 1960s through the mid-1970s were characterized by economic growth and development fueled by the private sector. The 60s and 70s were also an unprecedented growth period for higher education in the United States. Resources were in abundance and the sector enjoyed considerable public confidence. Whatever little planning practiced at the time focused mainly on managing growth, expansion and adding new facilities to accommodate the growing student population. Historically, the focus of formal planning in higher education has been on operational planning and forecasting. There was very little focus on the external environment. Planners were mainly interested on the organization of resources for the execution of specific projects.

The mid 1970s through the mid-1980s can be seen as the turning point in higher education and the era that ushered in formal strategic planning. During this period, the higher education sector faced several changes including demographic, economic and technological. Higher education costs kept rising; the public support the sector enjoyed over the years started to fade and in its place came the cry for accountability. This period in higher education was one of reduction after twenty years or so of relative affluence and expansion.

With these changes, the focus of planning in higher education began to change. Higher education institutions began to use the formal rational model of planning (Peterson, 1999; Schmidtlein & Milton 1990). Higher education institutions saw the top down model as appropriate for dealing with strategic concerns. The assumption was that the organization had specific goals for which action can be designed to achieve the goals. It was also assumed that
decisions about which actions to follow can be reached, and implementation followed the decision. Institutions of higher education associated certain advantages including visibility and continuity of the planning process with the rational approach (Peterson 1999).

In 1983, George Keller published a book by the title of Academic Strategy: The management Revolution (Keller, 1983). In the book, Keller advocated for higher education planning that featured broad participation and the use of data to design strategy. The publication of the book marks a significant shift in the focus of planning in higher education. During this period, colleges and universities started to take a closer look at strategic planning. Higher education’s potential use of strategic planning during this period changed from one of growth management to one of a rational management tool. As Lujan puts it, strategic planning was viewed as a “formal process designed to help a university identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements within which the university resides” (Lujan, 1997). Higher education’s use of strategic planning at this time focused on SWOT analysis, defining the institutions strategic position among other institutions, and comparative advantage. As Norris and Poulton (2008) noted higher education planning began to focus more on external forces. Higher education institutions began to focus mission, program priorities, and the resources needed to achieve program priorities (Steeples 1988). Strategic planning continued to enjoy a significant position in higher education through the 1980 into the early 1990s. Strategic planning was mainstreamed in the latter part of the 1990s.

The latter part of the 1990s marked a significant change in strategic planning in higher education. During this period, the focus of planning changed from the familiar concepts of identifying competitors and market niche to the consideration of new ideas such as continuous quality improvement, redesigning the organization and the consideration of new business
practices. Familiar strategic planning tools and concepts were augmented with newer approaches that considered the uniqueness of each organization (Rowley and Sherman, 2001). More and more, colleges and universities started to view strategic planning as a tool that helped them identify long-term directions. As Keller (2000) puts it, the focus of strategic planning became about organizational learning, creativity and changing existing structures and processes. Higher education planners began to focus more on change, the future, creating flexible organizations, and translating strategy to change.

Not only were creativity and change emphasized, emphasis was also put on the challenges of implementing ideas. There was the realization that there was more to planning than the exercise of simply coming up with creative ideas. As Rowley and Sherman (2001) noted, “Strategic planning isn’t just about learning about the environment.” Planning must also be about putting that learning into play by making change happen. In short, notions about strategic planning and planning practices in higher education continued to evolve and mature.

By 2001, the Society for College and University Planning had 4,200 members. While the major focus of SCUP continued to address facilities planning, its conferences and publications slowly began to cover the full range of strategic planning considerations. Strategic planning as a tool of management has become the norm in higher education institutions. The SCUP web page, for example, currently contains strategic plans from 600 higher education institutions around the country.

Over the years, strategic planning as practiced in higher education has evolved and improved and the importance of appropriate strategic planning is understood among leaders in higher education. College leaders view strategic planning as a management tool that can help
them define their mission, set their goals and priorities, and device the actions necessary to achieve these goals.

Higher education institutions continue to operate in an environment that presents a multitude of challenges and opportunities. There is a continuous call for more accountability, the need to do more with less continues, and the decisions and choices that higher education intuitions have to make have grown in complexity over the years. Given this, strategic planning in higher education has become more about learning and creativity. The learning college is a theme used more and more by institutions of higher education. Learning and creativity mean being flexible, inventive and imaginative. Higher education planners have come to realize that flexibility is a key ingredient for success.

There is also the realization that just planning is not enough. If the purpose of the strategic plan is to make change then whatever is identified in the plan has to be put to work. Higher education leaders are more and more emphasizing the impotence plan implementation. The literature makes it amply clear that there are several approaches to strategic planning and there is no single correct way to do strategic planning.

Higher education institutions are unique in their makeup. The literature on the uniqueness of higher education institutions, among other things talks about the importance of collegiality and shared governance in these organizations. Given this distinct organizational culture, higher education has been able to adapt strategic planning to fit its unique culture. As Schmidtlein (1990) suggests, higher education institutions’ understanding of the differences between their culture and that of the business sector has enabled them to find a strategic planning approach that works for them. It is important to choose a strategic planning approach that is compatible with the culture of the organization. This choice will enhance the managerial effectiveness,
productivity, and performance of the organization. Strategic planning approaches transferred to
and implanted in the context of higher education without adapting them to the unique culture of
institutions of higher education will not be effective.

Keller (1983, pp. 8-9) argues, “the dogma of colleges as amiable, anarchic, self-
correcting collectives of scholars with a small contingent of dignified caretakers at the
unavoidable business edge is crumbling. A new era of conscious academic strategy is being born.
The modern college and university scene is one that is no longer so fiercely disdainful of sound
economic and financial planning or so derisive of strategic management. Professors and campus
administrators are now uniting to design plans, programs, priorities, and expenditures to insure
their future.” Keller’s argument suggests that higher education institutions cannot effectively
manage the future unless they respond to change in an organized way.

The other impetus for strategic planning in higher education comes from the need to meet
the demands of the accountability movement and accrediting bodies. Higher education leaders
and scholars are currently emphasizing the importance of aligning strategic planning and
assessment as a way of achieving institutional effectiveness (Hollwell 2006; Middaugh 2010).
The available evidence suggests institutions of higher education can realize significant benefits
by purposely linking their strategic planning initiatives with outcomes assessment (Middaugh
2010).

Nationally, accountability has been pushed by the Voluntary System of Accountability
(VSA). The VSA which was developed in 2007 “is an initiative by public 4-year universities to
supply clear, accessible, and comparable information on the undergraduate student experience to
important constituencies through a common web report – the College Portrait”.
(http://www.voluntarysystem.org).
Regional accreditation bodies also require strategic planning as part of the accreditation process. For example, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education requires colleges that are in its region to have a strategic planning process to meet its accreditation requirements. Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal states: “An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development of and change necessary to improve and maintain institutional quality” (Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education, P 4).

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools requirement is stated as follows” The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission” (The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement).

The call and demand for planning and assessment by higher education accreditation bodies have prompted the development of a strategic planning approach that integrates planning and outcomes assessment (Hollowell, Middaugh, & Sibolski, 2006; Norris and Poulton, 2010; Middaugh, 2010; Reeves, 2008). Advocates of the integrated approach to planning argue that because an integrated approach requires ongoing environmental scanning and clearly defined performance outcomes colleges and universities can benefit from the resulting plan. Over the years, some have criticized the use of strategic planning in higher education. The argument against using strategic planning in higher education is based on several factors. The
first argument advanced suggests that a management tool that was developed and widely used in the business sector where success is measured in terms of profitability cannot be easily applied to higher education institutions where success is not easily measured. (Schmidtlein, 1990)

Others, Cope, (1985) contend that the unique culture of higher education institutions makes the application of strategic planning difficult. Since universities and colleges are made up of several units, making choices about the future, which is the essence of strategic planning, is often a difficult task.

While strategic planning in the business world is top down, the culture of collegiality and shared governance in higher education, require a planning approach that is participatory. As Lujan and Dolence (1997) put it, “within colleges and universities, the major means of production are the exclusive rights of the faculty, and top level strategic decision making cannot be adequately accomplished without the advice and consent of the professoriate.” The suggestion here is the full participation of all stakeholders in decision-making is required if the strategic plan is to succeed.

Writers have suggested that higher education institutions have to adapt strategic planning to account for the major organizational and cultural differences between the business world and higher education institutions. Cope, (1985) calls this approach contextual planning. The essence of contextual planning is the focus on cultural fit. As Cope, (1985) suggests, “greater emphasis should be placed on the institutions history and culture as part of the strategic that is necessary for a complex organization operating in a dynamic environment.”

Several writers have identified key factors associated with successful planning in higher education. Leadership from the top and a carefully selected planning group has been identified as one of the key success factors (Keller 2004; Sevier 2000; Tromp & Ruben 2004). Another key
success factor identified is the selection of pertinent issues as a planning target (Keller 2004; Peterson 1999). The planning in higher education literature emphasizes a planning process that is broad and participatory as a key ingredient to planning success (Keller 1983; Rose and Kirk, 2001; Tromp & Ruben 2004; Taylor & Machado 2006). Dolence (1997) calls for the incorporation of the data on the internal and external environment gathered through the SWOT process as a way of ensuring a successful planning process. Others (Chaffee 1984; Dooris 2004) suggest a planning process that is flexible and one that evolves as necessary ensures success. A planning process that is linked to resources and action plans is associated with success (Middaugh & Sibolksi 2006; Yaure 2004; Shirley 1988).

From its early application in the facilities arena to its later use in the areas of developing strategies and action plans, strategic planning in higher education has gone through several phases. In the late 1980 and early 1990’s higher education leaders were enamored with the rational and systematic approach strategic planning offered. Currently this approach to strategic planning is being augmented with an approach that looks at the culture, environment and the political dynamics that are in play within institutions of higher education.

As higher education institutions continue to operate in an environment that is marked with rapid change and ambiguity, leaders turn to strategic planning to address the challenges. To ensure success with the strategic planning efforts, higher education institutions need to adjust the strategic planning models developed in the business sector to fit higher education. There are lessons learned from strategic planning in the for profit sector that are applicable to higher education strategic planning. Higher education institutions’ unique organizational aspects have to be taken into account when strategic planning is undertaken. (Cochran 2008, Fain 2007)
The Benefits of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning benefits are generally viewed as the positive outcomes that are associated with engaging in a strategic planning process. Over the years, writers have classified the benefits in several ways. Earlier writers (Camillus, 1975) have tried to differentiate between the benefits that are associated with having a strategic plan and those that come as a result of formalizing the process. Others (Steiner, 1979) have attributed economic benefits to strategic planning. Ansoff (1991) speaks of the adaptive thinking that the organization benefits because of the strategic planning. Co-operative decision is another strategic benefit identified in the literature (Gabris, 1992).

“Strategic planning has been touted as one of the “hot” management innovations in the public sector; promising managers the benefits of a highly structured, future oriented management technique taken directly from the best run business corporations”. (Stokes and Wechsler1995). Public organizations engage in a strategic planning process because there is a strong belief among managers that they will benefit in a variety of ways.

Advocates of strategic planning in the public sector (Bryson, 2010; Nutt and Backoff 1993; Kotler 1989; Mercer 1992) present several benefits of strategic planning for public and nonprofit organizations. The first benefit identified is the promotion of strategic thought and action. Strategic thinking and action is future oriented. In fact, Bryson (2004) argues that the purpose of strategic planning is to foster strategic thinking and acting in the organization. “It is strategic thinking and acting that are important, not strategic planning” (Bryson, 2004 P 2). According Bryson, Strategic thinking leads to the systematic gathering of critical information to inform the strategic planning process. The information gathered during this process includes both internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization and the threats paused by the external
environment. Strategic thinking and acting also forces organizations to focus on future directions and establish organizational priorities tied to resources needed to accomplish the priorities.

Table 2-2
Strategic planning benefits identified in the literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved decision making</td>
<td>Bryson, 1995, 2004, 2010; Denhardt, 1985; Pindur 1992; Boyne 2001,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarification of directions and goals</td>
<td>Bryson, 2010; Poister, 2010; Kriemadis, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Way of knowing</td>
<td>Bryson, Crosby &amp; Bryson, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved morale, improved competency, teamwork,</td>
<td>Bryson, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and fulfillment of job responsibilities and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reduced anxiety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategic thinking and acting force the organization to be proactive and take an active stance in shaping its own future. Because strategic thinking and acting force decision makers to pay special attention to both internal and external trends, organizations that are involved in strategic planning are less likely to be taken by surprise because of a new development or trend.

Strategic planning is also associated with improved decision making because of the clearer direction and the unified vision it creates (Bryson, 1995, 2010; Denhardt, 1985; Pindur, 1992). Strategic planning helps focus public managers’ attention on issues that are critical to the organization and challenges facing the organization. Further, strategic planning helps organizational leaders formulate and communicate organizational strategies and the actions associated with the strategies. Based on the strategic actions, managers formulate the basis for decision making. The improved decision-making results in better choices regarding the budget, policies, programs, and goals (Boyne and Wechsler 1995, Boyne 2001, and Bryson 2004).

Another benefit associated with strategic planning is enhanced organizational responsiveness and performance. There is the view that strategic planning creates a framework for determining the direction the organization should take to achieve a desired future. Second, there is the suggestion that engaging in strategic planning raises the vision of all key participants, encouraging them to reflect creatively on the strategic direction of the institution. Further, it is argued that strategic planning facilitates the environment for dialogue between participants improving understanding of the organization’s vision and fostering a sense of ownership of the strategic plan. All these factors result in improved organizational performance.

Bryson who is perhaps the most influential scholar who has written extensively on strategic planning in public and nonprofit organizations suggests that one of the reasons strategic
planning has become a common practice in public and nonprofit organizations is because, as he puts it, strategic planning “works” and often “works extremely well” (Bryson, 2010).

Another benefit of planning is communication. Advocates of strategic planning in the public sector suggest that strategic plans communicate the strategic intentions of the organization to the entire organization making it an important tool for organizational dialogue and communication. Communication in turn leads to buy in and support for the strategic plan and the strategic directions encompassed by the plan (Lerner, 1999; Bryson, 1995, 2010; Dooris, Kelly & Trainer, 2004; Newman & Couturier, 2002 ;). Rowley, Lujan and Dolence (1997) argue that communication and broad participation are two essential ingredients to a successful planning process” (P.167). Communication helps ensure that individuals who have major plan implementation roles understand the plan and the reasons behind the plan

Others have suggested that strategic planning will strengthen and improve governance at the various levels of government. However, how much strategic planning will contribute to the improvement depends on the level of use of strategic planning and the capacity of the organization to develop and implement good strategies (Hendrick, 2010).

Bryson (2010) suggests that there are direct benefits for the people involved in the strategic planning process. These benefits take the form of improved morale, improved competency, teamwork, and fulfillment of job responsibilities and reduced anxiety.

Berry and Wechsler (1995) identify several benefits associated with strategic planning in public organizations. These benefits include the clarification of agency direction and goals, enhancement of external relations, improvements in internal management, improved budgeting and decision making, and improved service delivery and customer service.
Strategic Planning and Performance

Enhanced performance is identified as one of the many benefits of engaging in strategic planning (Bryson, 2010). Over the years, several research studies have attempted to establish the relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance. Several studies conducted over the years have shown positive relationships between strategic planning and performance. Organizations that practice formal strategic planning saw improved organizational performance measured in terms of some measurable outcome (Crusoe, 2000; Stewart, 2004; Al-Shamari & Hussein, 2007; Burnside, 2002; Ramanujam & Venkatraman, 1987). There were also studies that showed no relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance (Hahn & Powers, 1999; Leontiades & Tezel, 1980).

For example, in a 1991 study that examined 29 sample studies, Boyd (1991) reported that the results of the studies were very ambiguous. He goes on to point out that the studies were flawed on several grounds ranging from measurement errors to mixing different organizations in the studies. The methodology should be rigorous enough to capture the scope and depth of planning. Further, they argue that a methodology that simply tries to ascertain the presence or absence of a formal strategic plan does not get at the key critical variable, which is how the plan is used. They suggest a more rigorous and multidimensional methodology (Ramanujam, Venkatraman, and Camillus, 1986).

Another area related to planning and performance studies that can be gleaned from the review of the literature is generalizability. In other words, do studies conducted on a limited number of organizations in the private sector pertain to public and nonprofit organization? Do higher education institutions, for example, have to mimic large corporations by adopting the
planning systems used by these organizations to realize the benefits of planning? Research that focuses on a diverse cross section of organizations is lacking.

The literature also shows the studies have lumped industries from different sectors together (Rhyne, 1986). It is very difficult to determine the impact of planning on performance without somehow controlling for industry effects. Lumping organizations from different sectors together assumes that all of them have the same planning systems. Higher education leaders, for example, work in an environment where decision-making is shared and where the leader’s vision is entrusted to others to implement. In this type of an environment it is difficult to use authoritarian or top-down planning methods.

The measures used to establish the linkages with strategic planning and performance were for the most relied upon looking at the formality of the planning process and the level of the plan sophistication (Stewart, 2004; Crusoe, 2000; Bracker, 1988). These studies were problematic because both sophistication and formality were operationalized by the different studies in different ways. As a result, findings of these studies were inconsistent and not replicable.

The concern with the limited usefulness of planning and performance studies that relied on limited planning aspects such as formality and sophistication led towards the development of multidimensional measures of strategic planning and performance linkages. One of the earliest multidimensional studies documented in the literature is that of Boyd and Reuning-Elliott (1998). In their model, the authors incorporated seven activities commonly associated with the strategic planning process. These include, “mission statement, competitor analysis, long term goals, annual goals, action plans, and ongoing evaluation” (p. 189). The purpose of the
multidimensional approach was to determine which aspects of the strategic planning process contributed to improved organizational performance.

Later studies that applied the multidimensional model developed by Boyd and Reuning-Elliott were able to show reliable results showing positive linkages between strategic planning and performance. In a 2001 study that focused on sixteen processing companies in California, Baker and Leidecker (2001) were able to show a positive linkage between strategic planning and performance. They also found out the strongest relationships between strategic planning and performance were found in firms that relied on the mission statement, have long term goals, and where the strategic planning was evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Other studies that employed multidimensional approaches have established positive relationships between strategic planning and performance. For example, in a 1986 study of planning executives Richardson (1986) found that higher performing firms measured in terms of return on investment and shareholder return, used longer planning horizons and emphasized organizational participation in the strategic planning process.

In a study using meta-analysis, Miller and Cardinal (1994) found that strategic planning positively influences firm performance and that methodology was the primary reason for the inconsistencies reported in the literature. A close examination of previous studies on the relationship of planning and performance suggests that the results are mixed. Among the reasons given for the mixed results, include poor conceptualizations of planning. This includes, among other things, failure to include a representative sample of organizations in the studies. Most of the studies focused on large firms (Bracker and Pearson, 1986). The studies also employed a very narrow measure of firm performance (Kudla, 1980). Other studies failed to control for firm
differences. The studies failed to control for industry effects and compared planning and performance in firms from different industries (Hitt and Stadter, 1982).

Researchers who work in this area suggest more rigorous planning measures (Shrader & Dalton 1984; Rhyne, 1986; Bracker & Pearson, 1986). These writers argue that the impact of strategic planning on performance cannot be determined by simply asking chief executive officers whether they plan or not. The methodology should be rigorous enough to capture the scope and depth of planning. Further, they argue that a methodology that simply tries to ascertain the presence or absence of a formal strategic plan does not get at the key critical variable, which is how the plan is used. They suggest a more rigorous and multidimensional methodology (Ramanujam, Venkatraman, and Camillus, 1986).

Strategic Planning and Performance in Public and Nonprofit Organizations

Measuring the performance of public organizations has interested researchers for a long time. The interest in measuring performance in the 1990s was motivated by the desire for an efficient government. The next wave of interest in measuring performance in public organizations, which roughly covered the 1940s to the 1970s, was driven by the need to keep cost down. The reinventing government movement of the 1980 and 1990s kept interest in measuring performance in public organizations on the agenda of researchers. The interest during this period was mainly achieving efficiency and effectiveness in public organizations (Bouckaert, 1990).

The current interest in measuring performance in public organizations is related to the New Public Management and Reinventing Government as advocated by Osborne and Gaebler (Williams 2003; Poister, 2003; Ingraham, 2005). While measuring performance in public
organizations dates back to the 1990s, the driving forces behind it have changed over the years.

Measuring performance in public organizations is not an easy task because the goals and objectives of public organizations don’t lend themselves to easy measurement (Chun and Rainey, 2005). Others have pointed out that there is the danger of always trying to measure goals and objectives that lend themselves for easy measurement at the cost of neglecting the complex goals that characterize public organizations (Boher and Meier 2003; Boyne, 2003). Proponents of measuring performance in public organizations argue that when developed and used properly it benefits public organizations (Noordegraaf and Abma, 2003).

Although the number of public organizations that have implemented some form of strategic planning has increased over the years, and there is the general assumption strategic planning results in improved organizational performance, past empirical studies linking strategic planning and performance were mainly limited to private organizations, however, several recent studies focusing on public organizations point in that direction. The studies include case studies as well as surveys of local government managers involved in strategic planning.

In a survey of local government managers engaged in strategic planning Poister and Streib (2005) presented several strategic planning benefits and asked respondents to identify the benefits they associated with their strategic planning efforts. The strategic planning benefits identified by respondents included clarification of mission, goals and priorities, improved management and decision making, better communication with citizens, public support, employee development and enhanced performance.

Another survey research study of employees of the city of Milwaukee (Hendrick 2003) tested different dimensions of strategic planning including the manner in which strategic
planning was conducted and how that impacted organizational performance. The items included in the survey included comprehensiveness of the planning process, monitoring as part of the planning process, the level of participation the planning process, and commitment to planning. The study found that broad participation in the planning process and commitment to planning were positively correlated with performance. Hendrick was also able to determine from the study that comprehensiveness of the planning process and the extent of monitoring associated with the planning process were correlated with the organizations capacity to plan.

Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003) examined the impact of several planning dimensions on the performance of English local authorities. Using several measures including target setting, action plans, analysis of the internal and external environment, and perceived ease of planning Boyne and Williams attempted to measure the impact of planning and performance in the areas of service quality, efficiency, cost effectiveness. Even though the study didn’t establish the impact of planning on a single aspect of performance, their investigation led them to conclude that performance and planning have a complex relationship. Therefore, it is important to focus on this complexity and determine what aspect of the planning process impact performance.

Another study that was conducted in 2010, (Walker, Andrews, Boyne, Meier, and O’Toole, 2010) looked at the impact of strategic planning on English local authorities, found a positive linkage between strategic planning and performance. The empirical study employed a combination of performance indicators as the dependent variables to establish the performance planning relationship. The study found a strong relation between strategic planning and performance when the variable past performance was excluded as control variable in the equation.
Poister, Edwards, Arnett, and Berryman (2010), studied the impact of strategic planning on the performance of over one hundred public transit agencies in the United States. The study employed several performance measures including service effectiveness, cost effectiveness and efficiency. The disaggregated performance measures when measured separately resulted in determining that two of the items, efficiency and service effectiveness were positively impacted by strategic planning.

A similar study by Ugboro and Spann (2010) that focused on transit agencies in the United States found that certain dimensions of the strategic plan had a positive impact on the perceived benefits of strategic planning. Ugboro and Spann’s study employed factor analysis to develop strategic planning dimensions from multiple items. The final four dimensions that resulted from the factor analysis exercise were context, design, process and leadership and two, context and leadership, were found to have a positive impact on perception of enhanced performance.

A study that did not find a positive relationship between strategic planning and performance was conducted by Andrews, Boyne, and Walker (2009). The study focused on Welsh local governments and compared the impact of strategic planning, incrementalism and having no strategic plan. The survey based study developed a combination effectiveness measures and a performance variable from the items enumerated in the survey. The two significant findings of the study include no positive relationship between strategic planning and performance and negative performance in the absence of strategy.
The empirical studies of the types mentioned above are not always well received and encouraged by scholars who argue that strategic planning should be examined holistically and should not be treated “as a routine that is a fixed object” (Bryson, Crosby & Bryson, 2009 p175).

The argument advanced by Bryson and others centers around the idea that strategic planning encompasses “social, cognitive, social, and political” features where strategic thinking and acting figure prominently (Bryson, Crosby & Bryson, 2009). Given this, they argue, quantitative approaches to determine the linkages between strategic planning and performance do not work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s</th>
<th>Focus of study</th>
<th>Study findings/conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poister and Streib (2005)</td>
<td>Local government managers Researchers asked respondents to identify the benefits of strategic planning.</td>
<td>Respondents identified benefits including: mission clarification, improved management and decision making, better communication with citizens, enhanced performance and public support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hendrick (2003)</td>
<td>Study focused on local government in Milwaukee</td>
<td>Hendrick’s study found correlations between performance and particular dimensions of strategic planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyne and Gould-Williams (2003)</td>
<td>Study focused on English Local Authorities and examined the impact of planning dimensions on performance</td>
<td>The findings suggested that the linkage between planning and performance is complex. The relevant question is therefore, what aspects of planning impact performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker, Andrews, Boyne, Meier, and O’Toole (2010)</td>
<td>The study that focused on English local authorities employed performance indicators as the dependent variables to establish the relationship between performance and planning</td>
<td>Found strong relation between planning and performance. When past performance was excluded from the equation the relation was stronger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poister, Edwards, Arnett, and Berryman (2010)</td>
<td>Focused on the impact of strategic planning on the performance of transit agencies in the U.S.</td>
<td>The study found that when performance measures were examined separately, positive impacts were seen on efficiency and service effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugboro and Spann (2010)</td>
<td>The study used factor analysis to study the impact of strategic planning on performance in U.S. transit agencies</td>
<td>Two dimensions were found to have an impact on strategic planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew, Boyne, and Walker (2009)</td>
<td>The study focused on Welsh local governments and examined the impact of strategic planning, no planning and incrementalism</td>
<td>The study did not find relations between performance and planning. Negative performance was noted in the absence of planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategic planning is widely practiced in public and nonprofit organizations. The available evidence indicates that public and nonprofit organizations that engage in strategic planning accrue positive benefits. As Bryson puts it, “my guess is that the production of positive results will continue and that the magnitude of the effects across populations of government and nonprofits will increase incrementally over the next 10 years as experience with strategic planning grows, and as pertinent and useful research also increases (Bryson, 2010).
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the plan for the study and presents a description of the methodology used to conduct the study. The review of the strategic planning literature clearly showed that both public and private organizations garner specific benefits from engaging in strategic planning. Among the specific benefits identified in the literature, include improved organizational performance, future orientation, improved communication, enhanced teamwork, and better understanding of the organization.

Based on a thorough review of the strategic planning literature, the data collection and analysis were organized around answering the following five major research questions.

Does strategic planning promote strategic thinking and acting?

Does strategic planning lead to a better understanding of the college?

Does strategic planning enhance teamwork?

Does strategic planning improve communication?

Does strategic planning improve institutional performance?

The research approach taken and the data collection methodology utilized are illustrated in figure 3. As a starting point the literature in the areas of strategic planning in the private sector, strategic planning in public and nonprofit organizations, strategic planning in higher education, and literature on the benefits of strategic planning including the connection between strategic planning and performance was thoroughly examined.
Based on the review of the literature, five constructs were developed to guide the data collection phase of the study. To help study any variations in responses, Demographic data about the respondents and the institutions were also collected as part of the study.

Data to address the research questions was collected through an online survey distributed by email to faculty, staff and administrators in the sixteen community colleges in Maryland. Based on empirical studies conducted in business organizations, the planning literature suggests that strategic planning enhances organizational performance in these types of organizations. Measuring organizational performance in public organizations is not easy. In addition to the survey data collected, several documents including planning progress reports, plan documents and key performance indicator reports were reviewed and analyzed as a way of explicitly addressing the issue of enhanced performance derived from strategic planning.

During the document review phase of the project, performance reports linked to strategic plan goals were examined to see if they were actually achieved. When available, improvement over time was examined to see change over time if any. Open-ended comments made in the survey were also analyzed thoroughly for any hints of the linkage between strategic planning and enhanced organizational performance.
Topics covered in the chapter include

- Research strategy
- Survey development and administration
- Constructs
- Data collection and analysis
- Study assumption and limitations
Research Strategy

The research strategy followed in the study involved applying both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Mixed method research in the social sciences has been widely discussed in the literature. The approach employs the application of features of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Patton, 1990). The central premise of this approach is that the use of both approaches, quantitative and qualitative, in combination leads to a better understanding of the research question on hand (Creswell, 2003).

In the past, the discussion among social scientists has evolved around the superiority of one approach over the other in studying social phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Guba, 1990). The views held by writers fall into two distinct camps or schools of thought.

The widely held belief by adherents of the first school of thought argues that only a single approach, either quantitative or qualitative, is the only sound methodology or approach researchers should follow in trying to study and understand social events. The purist argument, as it is referred in the literature, is grounded in the notion that method and paradigm are linked in such a way that they cannot be separated thus making the mixed approach incompatible (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The second school of thought argues against the rigid view held by the purists and suggests a line of thinking that advances the compatibility of the two methods. Adherents of this school of thought argue that qualitative and quantitative methods are not mutually exclusive and suggest that they can be combined (Henderson, 1991; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Supporters of this approach suggest that combining the two approaches enhances the validity and reliability of the study (Kedder & Fine, 1987).
The debate among the followers of the two schools of thought has also focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the respective methods. While the purists suggest that the two methods are mutually exclusive and therefore inappropriate (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), proponents of the mixed approach argue that the focus should not be on philosophical issues such as the relationships between ontology and methodology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) and suggest a more pragmatic approach that allows for mixing approaches. The argument advanced by the pragmatists is grounded in the thinking that instead of deciding on methodology based on strict loyalty to a given school of thought, the research questions and the main purpose of the research should lead to the approach a researcher employs (Patton, 1990; Richardt & Rallis, 1994).

Recently writers have shown greater interest in mixed methods research and have specified where it is most appropriate. Some have gone as far as arguing that mixed methods research should be a distinct design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research (2003) identifies several studies that fit the mixed method research model. Among the studies that support the approach taken by this study, first collects data using a quantitative survey instrument and follows up with interviews with a few people who participated in the survey.

From the literature, it can be discerned that an approach that employs features of both quantitative and qualitative methods is permissible and offers several advantages. First, it offers the researcher the ability to study complex subjects in ways that cannot be fully addressed by a unitary approach (Richardt & Rallis, 1994). The approach is particularly advantageous when the purpose of the research is to seek convergent results, explore interconnected and /or distinct aspects of a phenomenon, and use methods in ways that complement one another (Caracelli & Graham, 1989).
Denzin (1989) suggests, “By combining multiple observers, theories, methods and data sources, researchers can overcome the ultimate bias that comes from single methods, single observers, and single theory studies”. Denzin refers to this as triangulation.

The approach taken in the current study is in line with the suggestion advanced by Patton. Mainly, aspects of both qualitative and quantitative methods are applied in the study because the subject of the study and the questions that guide the study require “the use of a variety of methods to be responsive to the nuances of particular empirical questions” (Patton, 2002).

The benefits of strategic planning are documented in the literature. Organizations engaged in strategic planning garner certain benefits associated with the process. With this as the backdrop, a questionnaire was developed to measure college personnel’s perception about the benefits of strategic planning. Second, while the linkage between strategic planning and performance is documented in the literature based on studies conducted in the private sector using measures such as return on investment and other financial indicators, the same type of evidence is lacking in the public sector in general and institutions of higher education in particular.

Given this lack of concrete evidence, the data collected through the questionnaire was supplemented by a thorough review and analysis of pertinent strategic planning and performance related documents. Thus, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed, and reported. The purposes of the document analysis in the present study was to supplement the data collected through the questionnaire and through this process determine if organizational performance enhancements can be attributed to the strategic planning activity as measured by performance indicators linked to the plan’s objectives.
Research Design

The aim of the study was to determine the perceived benefits of strategic planning in community colleges in Maryland. A descriptive research design was used with questionnaire as the primary means of data collection. The survey population comprised of administrators, faculty of staff at Maryland community colleges. The study starts out with defined questions and a well-defined plan for collecting and analyzing the data. In this type of study descriptive research is the commonly employed approach. Descriptive research is intended to produce clear, well-founded answers to some question and surveys are frequently used in descriptive research (Miller, 1991).

The current study involved the gathering of information about respondents’ perceptions about the benefits of strategic planning plays in community colleges. Further, the study involved examining and uncovering relationships between the variables employed in the study. Given the aim of the study, a design based on the tenets of descriptive research employing the questionnaire as the primary means of data collection is appropriate.
The components of the research design including the constructs and variables within each construct are captured in table 3-1 below.

Table 3
Constructs and variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Thinking &amp; Acting</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Questions (Q6 – Q15))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better understanding of the college</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Questions (Q16-Q21))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Questions (Q22-Q27))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Questions (Q28-Q34))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Performance</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Questions (Q35-Q37))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document review/analysis</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire employed in the dissertation was designed to obtain information about the perception of respondents about the benefits of strategic planning at their colleges. The first section of the survey was also used to collect background information such as the size of the institution, the location of the institution, the respondent’s length of service at the institution. The survey was developed based on the benefits organizations derive from strategic planning documented in the literature.

The five constructs employed in the study strategic thinking and acting, better understanding of the college, teamwork, communication, and institutional performance and the questions used to operationalize the constructs were developed after an extensive review of the strategic planning literature.
Strategic Thinking and Acting

Several authors (Nutt and Backoff, 1992; Barry, 1992, Bryson, 2004 and 2010) have identified several benefits associated with engaging in strategic planning. The first benefit identified in the literature is the promotion of strategic thinking and acting in the organization. The authors suggest that strategic thinking and acting are promoted through the gathering of information about the organization and its environment. The strategic thinking and acting process involves deliberating on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, clarification of future direction, and setting priorities for the organization. While strategic planning is viewed as the process of crafting the plan with its various components such as goals, strategies, action plans, measurement and implementation, strategic thinking is about synthesis (Bryson, 2004; Porter, 2008; Mintzberg, 1994). Strategic thinking involves organized activities directed at understanding the external environment and creating the capacity to understand the future (Bryson, 2010). Strategic thinking and acting also gets at “clarifying mission”, “figuring out what strategies are best”, “negotiating performance measures”, and building needed coalition of support” (Bryson, 2010 p. 255).

Better Understanding of the College

Strategic planning has been associated with a sharper focus on what the organization is all about (Bryson 2010; Crosby 2009). While there is no one prescribed model, the strategic planning process in public organizations including higher education institutions involves a series of processes designed to define institutional mission, developing strategies, developing strategic objectives, and the development of action plans. The development of implementation of the strategic plan leads to a better understanding of the organization. Organizational members can
express what the organization stands for, and it helps them reflect upon and understand the unique aspects of the organization. For the purposes of the current study the construct better understanding of the college is made up of six questions.

**Team Work**

A major assumption of strategic planning is that by participating in the planning process and taking responsibility for the action items developed in the plan, organizational members are more likely to take ownership of the goals and objectives of the plan. The literature also suggests that for strategic planning to succeed there needs to be broad based participation by organizational members. This is particularly true of institutions of higher education where the governance system is shared. Both faculty and administration have to participate in the process (Bryson & Bromely, 1993; Hurst & Peterson, 1992).

A great deal of teamwork takes place during the development of the strategic plan to ensure that the plan has considered all pertinent information, has taken into consideration all options available to the organization, and has the blessing of the whole organization. How much of the teamwork that is evident during the development phase of the plan carries forward as a result of implementing the strategic plan is the question explored in conjunction with the teamwork construct. Six questions make up the construct

**Communication**

The literature suggests that increased communication is one of the benefits of implementing a strategic planning process (Bryson, 1995, 2010). Strategic planning in institutions of higher education is a collaborative process that requires the support and commitment of the entire college community. As such, those charged with the task of planning,
usually planning committees, engage in widespread communication and feedback on the processes. Communication in turn enhances teamwork and results in good knowledge and understanding of the strategic plan and the role it plays in the institution. Communication creates an inclusive open process that fosters buy-in and elicits feedback about strategic planning. The literature also suggests that communication increases as teams engaged in strategic planning meet and exchange ideas. The communication construct is made up of seven questions.

Enhanced Institutional Performance

The research on strategic planning and performance, which for the most part was conducted within the private sector, suggests a link between strategic planning and improved organizational performance measured in terms improved financial performance, clear organizational mission, and competitive advantage. Measuring performance in public organizations is not as clear-cut as it might seem in the private sector. Even there, writers (Mintzberg 1994; Boyne 2004; Radin 2006) have argued that in an uncertain environment strategic planning might even inhibit an organization’s ability to engage in creative thinking that is critical to new ideas that might lead to better organizational performance. The results of attempting to establish a relationship between strategic planning and performance are at best mixed leaving the question open and debatable. The organizational contextual dimensions of public organizations makes trying to link strategic planning and performance even a more formidable task.

As discussed in the review of literature section several recent studies have made a significant contribution towards our understanding of the link between strategic planning and performance in public organizations. The current study is in the tradition of the line of research advanced by scholars who examine the relationship between planning and performance.
Within the context of the current study, performance is measured using two sources of data. The first source is the multi item questionnaire developed for the study. The second source of data include planning documents, end of year progress reports, and annual accountability reports all community colleges in Maryland are required to submit the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). The triangulation of information from the two sources provided a fuller context in which to examine the performance construct.

Sampling

Sampling methods are classified as either probability or non-probability. In probability samples, each member of the population has a known non-zero probability of being selected. Probability methods include random sampling, systemic sampling, and stratified sampling (Fowler, 1989). On the other hand, in non-probability sampling members are selected from the population in some non-random manner. These include convenience sampling, judgment sampling, and quota sampling. For the purposes of the present study the sampling approach taken is judgmental sampling because the number of community colleges in Maryland undertaking strategic planning is known and easily identifiable. Given this, the researcher can select the colleges participating in the study knowing that the information collected from them will meet the requirements and purpose of the study.

The sample selected for the study was the 16 community colleges in the Maryland system. There is a great heterogeneity in the size and location of these public institutions. Some are located in densely populated, urban areas while some are in less urban areas. What these institutions have in common besides being publicly funded community colleges is that all of them are engaged in some form of strategic planning. The colleges included in the study are as follows.
1. Allegany College of Maryland
2. Anne Arundel Community College
3. Baltimore City Community College
4. Carroll Community College
5. Cecil Community College
6. Chesapeake College
7. College of Southern Maryland
8. The Community College of Baltimore County
9. Frederick Community College
10. Garrett College
11. Hagerstown Community College
12. Harford Community College
13. Howard Community College
14. Montgomery College
15. Prince George’s Community College
16. Worwic Community College

Respondents were made up of chief executive officers, senior administrators, planning officers, and strategic planning committee members, and faculty and staff at each institution. As such, all were participants in the strategic planning process at their respective colleges. The planning directors coordinate the strategic planning process and in some cases co-chair the strategic planning body with the college CEO. Strategic planning bodies are made up of faculty, staff and students. Membership on these bodies is by appointment. All the respondents were
included in the survey because of their involvement in and knowledge of the strategic planning process at their respective organizations.

Data collection and analysis

The data for the study came from two major sources. Data to examine the five major research questions identified in chapter one came from a survey of Maryland community college personnel engaged in strategic planning. Measuring performance in public organizations is not a straightforward task and it was necessary to further explore the performance construct with supplemental information. In addition to the survey data, pertinent strategic planning related documents were thoroughly reviewed and analyzed. The documents studied include strategic plans, end of year progress reports, and annual performance reports submitted to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC)

The data analysis employed descriptive statistical methods to summarize data and get a description of the responses to the questions. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), each question was analyzed and scored. Simple frequencies, and mean scores were examined in the data exploration phase of the analysis. Since there were four different groups of respondents, significance differences between the groups were statistically tested to determine differences in perception. Following the data exploration phase of the analysis, statistical analysis techniques including factor analysis and regression analysis were applied to the data collected via the questionnaire.

The document analysis was conducted mainly to see if the issue of strategic planning and performance could be addressed more explicitly. The documents studied include planning
documents, strategic planning progress reports; mandatory performance reports submitted the Maryland Higher Education Commission and individual institutional effectiveness reports. The purpose of studying the documents was to see how much of the objectives and goals identified in the plans were actually achieved.

Questionnaire

Respondents’ perception about the benefits of strategic planning was collected through a survey. The survey instrument for the study was developed based on a survey instrument used in Pamela Ryder Lahey’s (2001) study of the purported benefits of strategic planning in the provincial court of Newfoundland. The constructs measured in the survey were determined based on an extensive survey of the literature. Establishing instrument validity is a fundamental component of ensuring the research effort is assessing the intended phenomenon. According to Fowler (1989), self-administered questionnaires require pre-testing. Fowler also suggests that the best way to pre-test a self-administered questionnaire is in person to a group of respondents. As specified in the literature, the current questionnaire was pre-tested on a group of respondents in November 2000. The respondents included directors and managers of strategic planning units of the public sector in Newfoundland. According to Leahy (2001), the pre-testing took two and a half hours. It took the people who took part in the pre-testing an average of 27 minutes to complete the questionnaire with a minimum of 25 minutes and a maximum of 33 minutes. The pre-test resulted in several recommendations for improvement and changes. To further refine the survey instrument it was field-tested on thirty respondents.

The instrument developer has taken all the necessary steps to demonstrate the validity of the instrument through both content and construct validity. The content validity of the instrument
was established through a rigorous review of the instrument's questions by knowledgeable experts to ensure that the instrument's items capture the essential aspects of the benefits of strategic planning. The construct validity of the survey was established through factor analysis.

For the purposes of the current study, the instrument (Figure 3-1) was modified to study the perception of college leaders about the benefits of strategic planning. Respondents were asked to complete the 39-item survey instrument organized around five benefits of strategic planning identified in the literature: Strategic thinking and acting, Better understanding of the organization, Teamwork, Communication, and organizational performance. They also were given the opportunity to provide comments. Respondents were asked to rate items on a five-point scale from a low of “1” to a high of “5.”

The survey starts out with six descriptor questions and proceeds to the purported benefits of strategic planning identified in the literature. The organization of the questionnaire components is depicted in figure 2 above.

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to collect background information on the respondent and the type of institution he/she is affiliated with. Part two of the survey is made up five major constructs. The first construct strategic thinking and acting is made up of ten questions. Six questions make up the second construct, better understanding of the college. Teamwork is the third construct and is made up of six questions. Communication is made up of seven questions. Last but not least, organizational performance is made up of three questions.

The first part of the questionnaire uses a combination of yes and no and multiple choice item questions. Since the questions are designed to collect background information on the respondent, the format is appropriate. The second part of the questionnaire is designed to
measure perceptions or opinions of the respondents. For this purpose a five point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree is the commonly taken approach.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data collection from Maryland community colleges involved in strategic planning. Out of the sixteen community colleges in the state of Maryland that were invited to take part in the study, eleven returned completed surveys. As discussed in the methodology section, the purported benefits associated with engaging in strategic planning, as described in the planning literature, were enumerated in the questionnaire and respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item on the survey.

To gain a deeper understanding of the critical connection between strategic planning and performance several documents including annual performance accountability reports all community colleges are required to submit to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), plan documents, Anne Arundel Community College’s Annual Institutional Assessment Report and the End of Year Progress Reports were closely examined as secondary sources of data.

The chapter is divided into four major parts. The data collection procedure and response rates are presented in part one. Part two presents descriptive data collected through the questionnaire. Part three presents the statistical analysis organized around the five constructs introduced in chapter three:
Construct one: Strategic thinking and acting
Construct two: Better understanding of the college
Construct three: Teamwork
Construct four: Communication
Construct five: Institutional performance

Part four presents analysis of the supplemental information garnered through the examination of plan documents, accountability reports and planning progress reports.

Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study was collected through an online survey. Email addresses of the respondents were obtained through the Institutional Research offices at each college. A letter inviting the respondents to participate in the study along with a link to the survey was emailed to each respondent at the sixteen community colleges in Maryland. Out of the sixteen community colleges invited to take part in the study, respondents from eleven colleges returned completed surveys for a participation rate of sixty nine percent. One hundred ninety-eight individuals were invited to complete the survey and responses from ninety eight participants were received. This translates into a 51.6 percent response rate. While research methods textbooks differ in their guidelines, Babbie (1990) suggests that a return of 50% is adequate.
Table 4  
Characteristics of respondents (N=98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee affinity group:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of service at the college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first section of the survey was designed to establish the characteristics of the respondents. Respondents were asked to identify their current position at the college, their years of service at the particular college, the location of the college and the size of the college they worked at. The location and size of the institutions were self-reported by the respondents. No other cross-referencing method was used to further define the size and location of the institutions. Respondents were also asked the role they played in the strategic planning process.
Based on their responses, respondents who took part in developing the strategic plan were defined as planners and respondents who indicated that they were involved in implementing the strategic plan were defined as implementers. The demographic variables are captured in table 4 above. The respondents represent a cross section of the colleges and employee groups with varying lengths of service at their respective colleges. The research is organized around five primary research questions. Several secondary research questions including differences in perceptions based on role, involvement in plan implementation, size of the institution, and location of the institution were also studied. The results from the survey are presented in the following section.

In the questionnaire all items were originally 5 point categorical variables from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” with a neutral response option. The simple frequency distribution analysis conducted during the data exploration phase of the study revealed some low or empty cell counts that required data recoding. Accordingly, each item was recoded to a three point categorical scale from one “does not agree” to three “strongly agree”. The items were normalized and standardized to facilitate further statistical analysis.

Construct one: Strategic Thinking and Acting

Ackoff (1974) describes planning benefits as the favorable outcomes that result directly from being engaged in strategic planning. “....any strategic planning process is worthwhile only if it helps key decision makers think and act strategically.” (Bryson, 1998:46). The strategic thinking and acting construct is made up of ten items in the survey. For purposes of the analysis, the items were rated on a three point scale ranging from strongly agree (3) does not agree (1) and mean scores for each item were calculated.
The majority of the responses on all the items that made up the strategic thinking and acting construct fell within the strongly agree or agree category. As captured in Table 4.1, over eighty percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed on forty percent of the items that made up the construct.

Table 4-1
Distribution and mean responses of strategic thinking and acting items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct one: Strategic thinking and acting</th>
<th>Does Not Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Decision-Making Governed Plan (Q6)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Ability To Look At Future (Q7)</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>2.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Appraisal of Strengths (Q8)</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Appraisal of Weaknesses (Q9)</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Clarification Of Priorities (Q10)</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Independent Thought/Action Of Employees (Q11)</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Employees To Exercise Initiative (Q12)</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Prepared College To Respond To Future Trends/Events (Q13)</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Creativity In Implementing Goals/Strategies (Q14)</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits Of Plan Greater Than Development Costs (Q15)</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the ten items, close to eighty-nine percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic plan contributed to the college’s ability to think about the future and plan for it. Another eighty percent saw the strategic plan as contributing towards clarifying priorities. Four items had a mean score of above two. The four items associated with the high mean scores; the strategic plan has contributed to the college’s ability to think about its future and plan for it, the strategic plan has contributed to the college’s ability to clarify its priorities, administrative decision making impacting college operations is governed by the strategic plan, and the strategic plan has contributed to the college’s ability to properly appraise its strengths indicate that respondents attach great value to strategic planning as a management tool that helps them address environmental issues looming in the horizon.

In addition, the responses show Maryland community college planners perceive strategic planning as a tool that can help them set priorities. Given the limited amount of resources community colleges have to work with, and the current atmosphere of doing more with less strategic planning could play a significant role in helping the community colleges set priorities and assigning resources among competing college priorities.

The four items associated with high mean scores and for which higher percentages of agree and strongly agree responses were received map with the benefits identified the literature. Bryson (2004, 2010, Nutt and Backoff, 1992, Barry 1997) suggests that one of the important benefits organizations derive from engaging in strategic planning is the promotion of strategic thinking, acting and learning throughout the organization. This is achieved by strategic planning’s tendency to help organizations figure out what strategies are the best among the available ones, and the role it plays in clarifying institutional mission.
Three items were associated with lower mean scores: "the strategic plan has encouraged creativity implementing goals and strategies"; "the strategic plan has given me the opportunity to exercise independent thought and action"; and "the strategic plan has resulted in employees exercising a high degree of initiative." The items with the higher disagree percent responses and low mean seem to be associated with what the literature refers to as Psychological benefits (Gerbing, 1994). Psychological benefits of engaging in strategic planning are described as “attitude influencing factors resulting from participating in the process of strategic planning” (Morgan, 2001 p. 223). Bryson (2010) describes this as direct benefits for the people involved in the planning process. The enhancement of planning capabilities including strategic thinking acting and learning are perceived to be the benefits mostly associated with engaging in strategic planning.

Construct two: Better Understanding of the College

Over the years, strategic planning has become a commonly used management tool in public organizations including higher education institutions. When thoughtfully carried out, strategic planning can help higher education institutions better understand the organization and the forces driving the need for change and innovation. The literature identifies better understanding of the organization as one of the many benefits of engaging in strategic planning (Bryson 2010; Poister 2010).

The process of developing and implementing a strategic plan leads to better understanding of the organization. Strategic planning helps organizational members ask some key questions. It helps organizational members where they want to go, how they will get there, what it takes to get there, and some way of knowing when they are there. The answers to these basic questions help define what the organization is all about, its underlying philosophies and
purposes, its long term and short term objectives, what its goals are, and what makes it unique. In other words, strategic planning leads to a better understanding of the organization.

Based on the literature the construct better understanding of the college is composed of six items. The six items include, improved ability to express what the college stands for, understanding the uniqueness of the institution compared to others, understanding of what need to be done by whom and when, better understanding of institutional goals, clear understanding of the role of the community college in society, and a clear understanding of the college and what it reflects.

Table 4-2
Distribution and mean responses of better understanding of the college items
(N=98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct two: Better understanding of the college</th>
<th>Distribution Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan Improved Ability To Express What College Stands For (Q16)</td>
<td>22.4  49.0  28.6  2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Helps Organization Members Understand Uniqueness Of Institution Relative To Others (Q17)</td>
<td>36.7  40.8  24.4  1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Improved Understanding of What Needs to Be Done, Where, and By Whom (Q18)</td>
<td>45.9  42.9  11.2  1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Resulted Better Understanding Of Institutional Goals (Q19)</td>
<td>21.4  56.1  22.4  2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Accurately Reflects College and What It Represents To Employees (Q20)</td>
<td>23.5  50.0  26.5  2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Fosters Clear Understanding of The Role of the Community College in Society (Q21)</td>
<td>32.7  43.9  23.5  1.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Close to eighty percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic plan contributed to their understanding of the college’s goals. Another seventy eight percent agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of the strategic plan they were able to express what the college stands for.

In line with what the literature suggests, the results of the survey show that over half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic plan helped members of the college community gain knowledge of what need to be done and by whom. This implies that the strategic plan is instrumental in defining clear directions for the colleges and actions emanate from the strategic plan.

The overall mean score for the six items that make up the construct better understanding of the college indicates that the strategic plan has contributed to respondents’ understanding of the college and what it represents. As can be seen on the table, three items, "I am better able to express what the college stands for as a result of the strategic plan," The college community has a better understanding of the college’s goals as a result of the strategic plan “and " The strategic plan is an accurate reflection of our college and is congruent with our ideas of what the college represents " have higher means than the rest of the times in the construct. Understanding of organizational goals and values that in turn promote the development of organizational commitment is one of the benefits (Bryson 2010) associated with engaging in strategic planning and the response patterns of the current study seem to be supported by the literature.

Construct three: Team Work

In line with their mission, community colleges are centers of community accommodating a variety of activities that support education, community service, workforce development and
economic development. The accommodation of these multiple goals requires teamwork. One of the benefits of engaging in strategic planning espoused in the literature is teamwork (Bryson 2010; Poister 2010). The literature also suggests that teamwork is desirable and tends to produce positive results. In the community college environment, teams are often comprised of workers who come with diverse backgrounds, and they bring their individual perceptions, experiences and skills that add richness and depth to the team.

The literature also suggests that going through a strategic planning process and the resulting planning documents create shared vision, maximize human and financial resources, and foster teamwork.

Table 4-3
Distribution and mean responses of team work items (N=98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct three: Teamwork</th>
<th>Does Not Agree %</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Strongly Agree %</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The college community works together with a greater degree of cooperation since the introduction of the plan (Q22)</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The strategic plan has created a more unified work culture between administrators and staff (Q23)</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team goals are encouraged in the college as a result of the Strategic plan (Q24)</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college’s leadership style has become more participatory as a result of the strategic plan</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A feeling of community and mutual support exists in the college as a result of the strategic plan</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Fosters Clear Understanding of The Role of the Community College in Society (Q21)</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The construct teamwork is made up six questions designed to get at the perception of respondents about teamwork and strategic planning. The results show four of the six items that make up the team work construct have the highest percentage of negative responses.

An interesting observation in the teamwork domain is the response to the question “the college’s leadership style has become more participatory.” The high percentage of respondents disagreeing with the statement and the low mean score of 1.44 strongly suggest that having a strategic plan does not necessarily translate into a participatory administrative style.

As can be seen on the table, the three high mean scores are associated with items related to team goals, cooperation and participation. While some respondents perceive some teamwork benefits associated with the strategic plan, a majority of the responses do not bear out this benefit espoused in the literature. It is interesting to note that, there is a perception that the plan creates a unified working environment between administrators and staff. This could be a direct effect of shared governance structure that is the tradition of higher education institutions including community colleges in Maryland. Another reason that could have influenced the response to the item could be the process involved in crafting the strategic plan. Most often community college strategic planning committees are made up of members including administrators, faculty, and staff and this could be viewed as unified working environment between administrators and staff.

Construct four: Communication

Enhanced communications is another benefit identified with strategic planning (Bryson 1995, 2010) Communication entails the sharing and exchange of ideas throughout the organization and enhanced communications are part of an organization that has implemented a strategic planning process.
The literature suggests that in addition to being a valuable management tool, the strategic plan also serves as an effective communication mechanism. By integrating the visions of the various entities within the college, it plays an important role facilitating the dialogue between and within departments. Communication in turn leads to more effective decision making and allocation of scarce resources.

The communication construct is made up of seven items. The responses clearly show that within the community college setting better communication is not one of the benefits of having a strategic plan.

Table 4-4

Distribution and mean responses of communication items (N=98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct four: Communication</th>
<th>Distribution Statistics</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does Not Agree %</td>
<td>Agree %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The introduction of the strategic plan was clearly communicated (Q28)</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long term goals and strategies of the plan have been clearly communicated to the college community (Q29)</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am encouraged to share and exchange ideas since the implementation of the strategic plan (Q30)</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback is received in a timely manner since the implementation of the strategic plan (Q31)</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear directions regarding who is responsible for implementing the strategic plan have been provided(Q32)</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication at the college has improved as a result of the implementation of the strategic plan (Q33)</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration throughout the college has improved as a result of the implementation of the strategic plan (Q34)</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seventy percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement “communication at the college has improved as a result of the implementation of the strategic plan”. While a majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed about the communication associated with the mechanics of the strategic plan, such as the introduction of the strategic plan, responses to the items related to improved communication and collaboration clearly indicated that in the community college setting, enhanced communication is not one of the benefits associated with having a strategic plan. Respondents did not perceive improved communication within the college as a result of the strategic plan.

While improved communication may hold true in the business world, the data from the survey seem to suggest otherwise. The low mean scores, for the communication item seems to suggest that in general the implementation of the strategic plan did not result in improved communication. This item will be further analyzed to see if there are any variations in perception by role of respondents and institutional attributes.

Construct five: Performance

The majority of the empirical work on the relationship between strategic planning and performance was carried out in the business world. Studies that examine the relationship between strategic planning and perceived benefits in higher education are not available. Based on the literature, for the purposes of this study, the performance construct was made up of three items.

For the most part respondents perceive institutional performance benefits from engaging in institutional planning. First, the responses established the existence of measurable performance indicators linked to the strategic planning. Second respondents perceived a positive movement in the performance indicators as a result of the strategic planning. This relationship
was further examined to determine any variations in perception by role of the planners and other institutional attributes

Table 4-5

Distribution and mean responses of institutional performance items (N=98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct five: Institutional performance</th>
<th>Distribution Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The strategic planning is linked to institutional performance indicators (Q35)</td>
<td>Does Not Agree %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college’s key performance indicators have improved as a result of implementing the strategic plan (Q36)</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This college’s performance is better than other community colleges not engaged in strategic planning (Q37)</td>
<td>53.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next phase of the analysis involved testing the dimensionality of the items specified under each construct. The statistical procedure used for this phase of the analysis is Principal components Analysis for categorical data (CATPCA) in SPSS 18. Principal Components Analysis was selected because it is appropriate for data reduction and identifying the underlying components of a set of variables (Karl L. Wuensch, 2011). Second, the procedure is data driven and does not assume linear relationships among numeric data and does not require normal distribution of data. After the items were transformed and normalized standard principle component and factor analysis with Varimax rotation were applied on the remaining transformed variables. Items with low communality coefficients were dropped. The factor analysis results are
presented in tables 4-6 through 4-9. The questionnaire had ten items associated with the strategic thinking and acting construct.

Table 4-6
Factor analysis: strategic thinking and acting, and employee engagement items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (all standardized)(^a)</th>
<th>Strategic Thinking</th>
<th>Employee Initiative</th>
<th>Extraction Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Component Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Decision-Making Governed Plan (Q6)</td>
<td>0.685</td>
<td>-0.431</td>
<td>0.654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Ability To Look At Future (Q7)</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
<td>0.687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Appraisal Strengths (Q8)</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td>-0.363</td>
<td>0.716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Appraisal Weaknesses (Q9)</td>
<td>0.639</td>
<td>-0.305</td>
<td>0.501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Clarification Of Priorities (Q10)</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td>-0.137</td>
<td>0.549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Independent Thought (Q11)</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>0.598</td>
<td>0.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Employees To Exercise Initiative (Q12)</td>
<td>0.321</td>
<td>0.730</td>
<td>0.635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Prepared College To Respond To Future (Q13)</td>
<td>0.690</td>
<td>-0.020</td>
<td>0.477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Creativity (Q14)</td>
<td>0.690</td>
<td>0.403</td>
<td>0.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits Of Plan Greater Than Development Costs (Q15)</td>
<td>0.682</td>
<td>0.233</td>
<td>0.519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue:</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance Explained (%):</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rotated Component Matrix\(^b\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (all standardized)(^b)</th>
<th>Strategic Thinking</th>
<th>Employee Initiative</th>
<th>Extraction Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Decision-Making Governed Plan (Q6)</td>
<td>0.809*</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Ability To Look At Future (Q7)</td>
<td>0.764*</td>
<td>0.320</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Appraisal Strengths (Q8)</td>
<td>0.843*</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Appraisal Weaknesses (Q9)</td>
<td>0.705*</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Contributed To Clarification Of Priorities (Q10)</td>
<td>0.697*</td>
<td>0.252</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Independent Thought (Q11)</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.773*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Employees To Exercise Initiative (Q12)</td>
<td>-0.095</td>
<td>0.791*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Prepared College To Respond To Future (Q13)</td>
<td>0.604*</td>
<td>0.334</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encouraged Creativity (Q14)</td>
<td>0.388</td>
<td>0.698*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits Of Plan Greater Than Development Costs (Q15)</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>0.548*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue:</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance Explained (%):</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of Key items ((\alpha)):</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of items:</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)All items were recoded to a 3 point categorical scale from one ("does not agree") to three ("strongly agree").

\(^b\)Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization, with convergence in 3 iterations.
The factor analysis procedure led to two distinct dimensions that were labeled strategic vision and employee initiative. The first dimension underlying the perceived strategic thinking and acting benefit had six items that explained thirty seven percent of the total variance and were characterized by strong individual loadings. The second dimension, labeled employee initiative had four items that explained twenty three percent of the total variance. Based on the eigenvalues and the alpha coefficients, all scale items were kept to be used in further analysis.

Table 4-7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (all standardized)*</th>
<th>Better Understanding</th>
<th>Institutional Performance</th>
<th>Extraction Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Component Analysis</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Improved Ability To Express (Q16)</td>
<td>0.611</td>
<td>-0.475</td>
<td>0.599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Helps Understand Uniqueness (Q17)</td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td>-0.391</td>
<td>0.665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Improved Understanding (Q18)</td>
<td>0.710</td>
<td>-0.360</td>
<td>0.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Understanding Of Institutional Goals (Q19)</td>
<td>0.629</td>
<td>-0.397</td>
<td>0.553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Accurately Reflects College (Q20)</td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the Community College (Q21)</td>
<td>0.698</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>0.508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked To Institutional Performance Indicators (Q35)</td>
<td>0.696</td>
<td>0.393</td>
<td>0.639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of performance indicators (Q36)</td>
<td>0.689</td>
<td>0.470</td>
<td>0.695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This College's Performance is Better (Q37)</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>0.548</td>
<td>0.539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eigenvalue:</strong></td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variance Explained (%):</strong></td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Rotated Component Matrix</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan Improved Ability To Express (Q16)</td>
<td>0.770*</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Helps Understand Uniqueness (Q17)</td>
<td>0.787*</td>
<td>0.214</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of What Needs to Be Done(Q18)</td>
<td>0.761*</td>
<td>0.232</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Understanding Of Institutional Goals (Q19)</td>
<td>0.728*</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Accurately Reflects College (Q20)</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>0.656*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of the Community College (Q21)</td>
<td>0.404</td>
<td>0.587*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked To Institutional Performance Indicators (Q35)</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>0.765*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement of performance indicators (Q36)</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>0.816*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This College's Performance is Better (Q37)</td>
<td>-0.027</td>
<td>0.734*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eigenvalue:</strong></td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variance Explained (%):</strong></td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability of Key items (ά):</strong></td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of items:</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aAll items were recoded to a 3 point categorical scale from one ("does not agree") to three ("strongly agree").
bVarimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization, with convergence in 3 iterations.
*Key item for summary scale.
Table 4-7 above presents the factor analysis results for the construct better understanding of the college and institutional performance. The construct better understanding of the college was operationalized with six items on the questionnaire. The factor analysis led to the deletion of two items from the analysis because of their lack of variation. The items excluded from the analysis were “the strategic plan is an accurate reflection of the college and is congruent with our ideas of what the college represents” and “the strategic plan fosters a clear understanding of the role of the community college in society”. The four items kept explained 31 percent of the total variation and had high alpha values as well as an eigenvalue greater than one. All three items associated with the performance construct were kept in the analysis because of their high loading and high reliability measured by their alpha value.

The construct team work was made up of five items. The items associated with the construct include The college community works together with a greater degree of cooperation and coordinated effort since the introduction of the strategic plan, the strategic plan has created two cultures in the college, one for administrators and one for stuff, team goals are encouraged in the college as a result of the strategic plan, the college’s leadership style has become more participatory, a feeling of community and mutual support exists in the college, and the college has become more collegial and empowered.

The factor analysis resulted in two dimensions. The first dimension associated underlying the perceived team work benefit had three items that explained forty one percent of the total variance. The second dimension labeled goals oriented culture had two items that explained fifty percent of the total variation. The high alpha values along with the strong factor loadings resulted in keeping all three scale items.
Table 4-8

Factor analysis: team work items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (all standardized) a</th>
<th>Teamwork Culture</th>
<th>Goals Directed Culture</th>
<th>Extraction Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Component Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Created two cultures in the college (Q23)</td>
<td>0.445</td>
<td>0.761</td>
<td>0.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Goals Encouraged By Plan (Q24)</td>
<td>0.646</td>
<td>0.431</td>
<td>0.604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Style More Participatory (Q25)</td>
<td>0.776</td>
<td>-0.159</td>
<td>0.628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College More Collegial, Empowered (Q26)</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>-0.475</td>
<td>0.810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Of Community &amp; Mutual Support Exists(Q27)</td>
<td>0.756</td>
<td>-0.173</td>
<td>0.602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue:</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance Explained (%):</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rotated Component Matrix b</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan Created two cultures in the college (Q23)</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.881*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Goals Encouraged By Plan (Q24)</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>0.696*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Style More Participatory (Q25)</td>
<td>0.752*</td>
<td>0.250</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College More Collegial, Empowered (Q26)</td>
<td>0.900*</td>
<td>-0.029</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Of Community &amp; Mutual Support Exists (Q27)</td>
<td>0.741*</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue:</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance Explained (%):</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability of Key items ((\hat{\alpha})):</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of items:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a All items were recoded to a 3 point categorical scale from one ("does not agree") to three ("strongly agree").

b Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization, with convergence in 3 iterations.

*Key item for summary scale.

The communication construct was made up of seven items on the questionnaire. The factor analysis resulted in two dimensions. The first underlying dimension labeled clarity of communication is composed of four items. The four items explain 35.4 percent of the total variation. The second underlying dimension labeled quality of communication incorporates three items that explain 28.5 percent of the total variation. All items were kept for inclusion in the multivariate analysis.
Table 4-9
Factor analysis: communication items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items (all standardized)(^a)</th>
<th>Clarity of Communication</th>
<th>Quality of Communication</th>
<th>Extraction Communalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Component Analysis</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Introduction Clearly Communicated (Q28)</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>-0.256</td>
<td>0.546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Goals/Strategies Clearly Outlined (Q29)</td>
<td>0.707</td>
<td>-0.462</td>
<td>0.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encourages Exchange Of Ideas/Opinions (Q30)</td>
<td>0.569</td>
<td>-0.406</td>
<td>0.488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback Received In Timely Manner (Q31)</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>0.141</td>
<td>0.686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability Regarding Implementing Goals/Objectives Is Clear (Q32)</td>
<td>0.638</td>
<td>-0.218</td>
<td>0.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Has Improved Communication (Q33)</td>
<td>0.690</td>
<td>0.534</td>
<td>0.761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration Has Improved (Q34)</td>
<td>0.534</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rotated Component Matrix</strong>(^b)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Introduction Clearly Communicated (Q28)</td>
<td>0.707*</td>
<td>0.216</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Goals/Strategies Clearly Outlined (Q29)</td>
<td>0.843*</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Encourages Exchange Of Ideas/Opinions (Q30)</td>
<td>0.699*</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback Received In Timely Manner (Q31)</td>
<td>0.564</td>
<td>0.606*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability Regarding Implementing Goals/Objectives Is Clear (Q32)</td>
<td>0.640*</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Has Improved Communication (Q33)</td>
<td>0.226</td>
<td>0.843*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration Has Improved (Q34)</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
<td>0.906*</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability of Key items (ά):</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of items:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)All items were recoded to a 3 point categorical scale from one ("does not agree") to three ("strongly agree").

\(^b\)Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization, with convergence in 3 iterations.

*Key item for summary scale.
Summary

Based on an extensive review of the literature, five constructs were developed and used in the study. Each construct was operationalized by a set of items and respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each item associated with the constructs.

The first construct, strategic thinking and acting, was made up of ten items. The frequency distribution and the mean scores clearly showed that strategic thinking and acting is perceived as a benefit of engaging in strategic planning by Maryland community college respondents who participated in the study. In particular four items had high mean scores and a high proportion of strongly agree or agree responses. These items are the essence of the concept of strategic thinking and acting as described in the literature. Strategic thinking and acting, according to Bryson (2004), Nutt and Backoff (1992), Barry (1997) involve organized conversation around understanding the organization’s strengths and weaknesses, establishing organizational priorities, and clarification of future directions.

The construct better understanding of the college was operationalized by six items on the questionnaire. Three of the six items had high mean scores indicating respondents positive perception of better understanding of the college as a strategic planning benefit. This perceived benefit is related to the strategic plans ability to...
provide organizational members with clear objectives and directions for the future of the organization.

While the literature identifies teamwork as one of the benefits of strategic planning, the low mean scores and the high proportion of disagree responses suggest, at least in the community college setting, team work does not seem to be a benefit of strategic planning. While team work is involved in crafting the strategic plan, this does not necessarily translate into the everyday operations of the colleges.

The communication construct was made up of seven items. The analysis showed that contrary to what the literature suggests, enhanced communication did not appear to be a perceived benefit of strategic planning. Items that asked direct questions about communication improvement as a result of strategic plan garnered high proportion of do not agree responses.

Enhanced performance is one of the benefits advocates of strategic planning suggest. For the purposes of the current study, enhanced performance was operationalized by three items. Two of the three items, “the strategic planning is linked to performance measures” and “the college’s key performance indicators have improved as a result of implementing the strategic plan” were associated with high proportion of strongly agree or agree answers and high mean scores.

The simple frequency distribution analysis conducted during the data exploration phase of the study revealed some low or empty cell counts that required data recoding. Accordingly, each item was recoded to a three point categorical scale from one “does not agree” to three “strongly agree”. The items were normalized and standardized to facilitate further statistical analysis. The factor analysis process resulted in eight summary scales.
Table 4-10

Summary scales derived through factor analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Scale</th>
<th>Questionnaire Items Included</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicative Clarity</td>
<td>Questions 28, 29, 30, 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Quality</td>
<td>Questions 31, 33, 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Vision</td>
<td>Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement</td>
<td>Questions 11, 12, 14, 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork Culture</td>
<td>Questions 25, 26, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Goals</td>
<td>Question 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Mission Clarification</td>
<td>Questions 16, 17, 18, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Institutional Performance</td>
<td>Questions 20, 21, 35, 36, 37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While reporting the mean responses for each construct was useful, examining how perceptions vary by other attributes was necessary to discover patterns in the data. After the factor analysis was conducted, relationships between the major variables were examined using cross tabulations. Cross tabulation is a commonly used statistical technique for analyzing the relationship between two variables that are organized in a bivariate table. Using such a table, allows the examination of the presence of relationships between variables.

In the bivariate analysis relationships of the perceived benefits of strategic planning by institution size and institution location were examined to see if respondents’ perceptions of the benefits varied by institutional size and location (Appendix B).

In the survey instrument, institutional location was defined as urban, rural, and suburban. Size was defined as, large, medium, and small. In addition, the role respondents played in the
planning process and their perception of the strategic planning benefits were examined. Role in the planning process was defined as “planner” and “implementer”. Chi square testes were used to test for independence. T-tests were used to test for differences in the mean scores and finally Z test were used to test for differences in pairs of proportions.

The bivariate analysis revealed several interesting differences when the perceived benefits were examined in relation to the respondents’ institutional size and location. Respondents at small institutions strongly agreed that strategic planning helped clarify the institutions’ strategic vision. The mean score (2.36) of respondents at small colleges were significantly higher than those of both large and medium colleges.

When strategic vision was examined in relation to the respondents’ college location, rural respondents strongly agreed that, the strategic planning helped enhance the strategic vision. The mean score, (2.41), for rural community college respondents was significantly different from that of suburban community colleges. The proportional differences of rural and suburban respondents were also statistically significant.

Teamwork as a benefit of strategic planning was perceived differently when examined by the respondents’ institutional size. The mean score of respondents at medium college was higher than that of respondents at both large and small community colleges. In addition to the mean score differences, significant proportional differences between large and medium colleges were observed. A larger proportion of respondents at medium community colleges tended to agree or strongly that the strategic planning process enhanced teamwork.

When specificity of team goal as a benefit of strategic planning was examined in conjunction with institutional size and location significant differences in mean scores emerged. The mean score for rural respondents was significantly higher than the ones recorded for both
suburban and urban respondents. When team goal was examined by institutional size, respondents at small colleges had significantly higher mean scores. In addition to the difference in mean scores, statistically significant proportional differences were found between the responses of respondents from small and large institutions.

The benefit of improved mission clarification was perceived differently between respondents at rural and urban institutions. Rural respondents tended to strongly agree or agree that the strategic plan improved mission clarification than their suburban counterparts. The mean score of rural respondents was also significantly higher than that of suburban respondents.

Bivariate relationships examined in conjunction with respondents’ self-reported role they played in strategic planning revealed differences in perceived benefits (Appendix C). First, respondents who indicated that they were involved in the strategic planning as well as implementing the plan had significantly higher mean scores on the perceived benefit of communication quality. Proportionately higher percentage of both planner and implementers agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic plan enhanced communication quality.

Enhanced strategic vision as a perceived benefit of strategic planning was seen as a benefit by respondents who were involved in the implementation of the strategic plan. The mean score of implementer was significantly higher than that of the respondents identified as planners.

Plan implementers had a significantly high mean score than planners on the employee engagement scale. A statistically significant proportional difference between planners and implementers was also observed for the employee engagement benefit. A significantly higher proportion of plan implementers agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic plan enhanced employee engagement.
The strategic planning benefit of enhanced institutional performance was perceived differently by planner and implementers. The mean score of strategic plan implementers was significantly higher than that of respondents not involved in strategic plan implementation. A statistically significant proportion of plan implementers agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic plan enhanced institutional performance.

Summary

Bivariate analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between perceived strategic planning benefits and the respondents’ college size and location. Further, the relationships between the respondents’ role in strategic planning and their perception of strategic planning benefits were analyzed. Of the eight perceived benefits, significant differences in perception were found in four when they were examined in relation to institutional size and location. These include strategic vision, teamwork, team goals, and enhanced mission clarification.

When the bivariate analysis focused on differences in perception in relation to respondents’ role in strategic planning, significant differences in perception between planners and implementers were apparent. Implementers saw enhanced organizational performance as one of the benefits of engaging in strategic planning. Implementers also associated employee engagement with strategic planning.

The bivariate analysis looked at the relationship between two variables. In bivariate analysis the observation is limited to the impact of one variable on another. The bivariate analysis does not indicate the exact relationship of the variables. We could not say by how much a given increase in one variable would raise or lower the other variable. The next step in the
analysis involved examining the perceived benefit of enhanced organizational performance using stepwise regression analysis.

The literature makes it amply clear that organizations engaged in strategic planning garner enhanced organizational performance as an outcome of their strategic planning efforts. For the most part the majority of the research work that looked at the relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance, however, was conducted using data generated in business organizations. However, recently several studies that focus on the linkages between strategic planning and performance in public organizations have surfaced. Focusing on the fundamental outcome of strategic planning, enhanced organizational performance, in conjunction with public organizations is an important undertaking.

In the current study, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with a set of questions designed to measure their perception of the strategic plan’s contribution towards enhanced organizational performance. The questions presume that respondents know enough about the intent of strategic planning and have a clear sense of how well the institution is performing. The summary scale for gauging improvement in performance reflects this thinking process where respondents’ measure perceived institutional performance (Q30 to Q32) in terms of their understanding of how well the strategic plan reflects what the college stands for.

Given the higher level evaluative intent of the questions, the study employed stepwise regression analysis to tease out which aspects of the strategic plan may positively impact respondents’ perceptions of improved organizational performance.

Model one (table 4-11) shows that when the respondents take the role of implementing the strategic plan, the perception of improved institutional performance improves over those who
Table 4-11

Linear regression analysis on the impact of significant strategic plan components for perceived institutional performance enhancement (N=98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Specification</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP ONE: CONTROL GROUP MODEL</strong>&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved with Plan Implementation (dummy)</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Institutional Location (dummy)</td>
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<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.56</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP TWO: IMPACT OF STRATEGIC VISION COMPONENT</strong>&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved with Plan Implementation (dummy)</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Institutional Location (dummy)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Vision Rating (standardized)</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.72</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.74</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP THREE: IMPACT OF TEAM GOAL SETTING</strong>&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved with Plan Implementation (dummy)</td>
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<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Institutional Location (dummy)</td>
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<td>0.21</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Vision Rating (standardized)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Goals Specified In Plan (standardized)</td>
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<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.72</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.83</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>The intercept contains the respondents in the reference categories at rural and urban schools, and those who were not involved in plan implementation.

<sup>b</sup>Model fit statistics: R=.287; R²=.082; Adjusted R²=.063; F=4.3; p=.017.

<sup>c</sup>Model fit statistics: R=.507; R²=.257; Adjusted R²=.233; F=10.9; p<.001. Model fit change from Model 1: R² change=.174; F Change=22.1; p<.001.

<sup>d</sup>Model fit statistics: R=.561; R²=.315; Adjusted R²=.285; F=10.7; p<.001. Model fit change from Model 2: R² change=.058; F Change=7.9; p=.006.
do not take the role of implementing the strategic plan. Non-implementers tended to disagree that institutional performance improved as a result of the strategic planning.

The success of the strategic plan depends on implementation (Plant, 2009). Given this, the question who is involved in the implementation of the strategic plan is critical in public organizations. Looking at the impact of strategic planning and how it is perceived by the role one plays in the strategic planning arena is critical. The general belief is strategic planning works and organizations engaged in strategic planning garner some benefits. It is important to understand what aspects of planning work so that a more effective planning process can be put in place. The finding suggests that, involving more individuals in implementing the strategic plan actions might result in a more successful planning experience for the institutions. From experience leading strategic planning efforts at Community colleges, I can state that a lot of effort is spent on setting up strategic planning efforts making sure there is wide involvement in the planning process. However, implementation of the strategic planning actions is left to a select group of individuals unusually defined by function. Perhaps there is a need to open up the implementation process to wider group.

Enhanced organizational performance has been identified with strategic planning in private organizations has been well documented in the literature (Miller & Cardinal, 1994). The recent literature on performance and strategic planning in public organizations has also documented strategic planning and performance linkages (Boyne and Gould-Williams, 2003; Hendricks, 2003; Poister and Edwards, 2010). What aspects of the strategic plan are particularly linked to strategic planning has been the focus of some of the recent studies mentioned. The current study is in line with the previous studies.
Models two and three indicate that the strategic plan itself can contribute to enhanced perceptions of improved institutional performance. Respondents who agreed that their strategic plan incorporated a clear governance structure, helped the college assess its strengths and weaknesses, and helped the college anticipate future challenges (Q6-Q10 and Q13) had higher scores on the perceived performance items.

In addition, those respondents who agreed that team goals were encouraged as a result of the strategic planning also contributed to enhanced perceptions of improved performance. The current literature (Bryson, 2010; Poister, 2010) bears out the findings. For example, Poister (2010) has suggested that if strategic planning is to remain a relevant tool in public organizations the process has to lead to “out of the box” thinking and help public managers understand future trends. The process has to also help organizations assess their strengths and weaknesses and capabilities.

It is important to note that these relationships may not apply to all colleges. Respondents at suburban colleges in particular were more likely to agree that institutional performance improved as a result of strategic planning. This finding is different from previous studies that looked at performance and firm size carried out in conjunction with private firms (Fredrickson & Mitchell1984; Miller & Cardinal, 1994). The studies have generally concluded that strategic planning is beneficial to large firms. For example, Mintzberg (1994) suggests small firms tend not to utilize strategic planning for two main reasons. First, their organizational environment is not as complex as that of larger firms. Second, given the less complexity a single manager or a small group of leaders can handle the internal functioning of the firm without having to resort to strategic planning. In Maryland, suburban community colleges tend to be smaller and their environment is less complex than their urban counterparts yet the results suggest that the
perception of strategic planning and performance is strong. A variety of other interaction effects and organizational performance were explored, however, none of a full set of interaction terms was significant.

Another finding suggests that if the perception of strategic planning and improved organizational performance in community colleges is to be enhanced, the strategic plan has to meet several conditions. First, the strategic plan has to have a clear strategic vision. The strategic plan has to be future oriented and focused on handling future eventualities. Positive performance perceptions may further be enhanced if the plan encourages teamwork. Further, the strategic plan goals need to reflect the mission of the college.

These findings suggest that one type of strategic plan does not fit all types of organizations. The identification of important planning characteristics should provide valuable insight community college strategic planners can use to cast strategic planning in more realistic and applicable terms. In the case of Maryland community colleges, an effective strategic plan has to encompass several key features including, team work, future orientation, strategic vision and mission to be perceived as contributing to organizational performance.

Since their beginning, community colleges have defined their existence in terms of identifying and responding to the educational needs of the adult learners in their respective jurisdictions (Vaughn, 1997). Over the years, the educational needs of adult learners have changed and community colleges have to constantly adapt to the changing need and respond accordingly. The tool community colleges have used to focus on this particular challenge has been the institutional mission. Boggs (1975, p.71) argues the most successful community colleges are those “that have developed a well-defined mission and a shared vision of the future”.
One of the perceived benefits examined in the study was the strategic plan’s contribution towards mission clarification (Bryson, 2004, 2010). Respondents were asked how well the strategic plan helped to clarify their institution’s mission, purpose, and role it serves in the community. The regression analysis (table 4-14) revealed several interesting relationships between the perceived benefit of mission clarification and the strategic plan.

The first finding suggests that the role respondents played in the planning process had an influence on how he/she perceived the strategic plan’s contribution towards mission clarification. Respondents involved in the planning process “planners” were more likely to associate the strategic plan with mission clarification. This is not a surprising finding given the fact that planners are more intimately familiar with the strategic plan than those whose participation in the strategic planning process might be marginal.
Table 4-12

Linear regression analysis on impact of significant strategic plan components for improved mission clarification (N=98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Specification</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP ONE: CONTROL GROUP MODEL</strong>&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in Planning Process (dummy)</td>
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<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Size Institution (dummy)</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>-0.30</td>
<td>-2.48</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Size Institution (dummy)</td>
<td>-0.82</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td>-3.28</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEP TWO: IMPACT OF PLAN COMPONENTS</strong>&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in Planning Process (dummy)</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Size Institution (dummy)</td>
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<td>0.20</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Size Institution (dummy)</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>-2.99</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Clarity Rating (standardized)</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Vision Rating (standardized)</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement Rating (standardized)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STEP THREE: PLAN COMPONENTS INTERACTION</strong>&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in Planning Process (dummy)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Size Institution (dummy)</td>
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<td>N.S.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Large Size Institution (dummy)</td>
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<td>-3.43</td>
<td>0.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Clarity Rating (standardized)</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Vision Rating (standardized)</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Engagement Rating (standardized)</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Size by Strategic Vision Interaction</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>N.S.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The dependent outcome variable, Improved Mission Clarification, is standardized.

<sup>a</sup>The intercept contains the respondents in the reference categories at small schools, and those who were not involved in the planning process.

<sup>b</sup>Model fit statistics: R=.386; R²=.149; Adjusted R²=.122; F=5.5; p=.002.

<sup>c</sup>Model fit statistics: R=.705; R²=.497; Adjusted R²=.463; F=15.0; p<.001. Model fit change from Model 1: R² change=.348; F Change=20.9; p<.001.

<sup>d</sup>Model fit statistics: R=.730; R²=.533; Adjusted R²=.496; F=14.7; p<.001. Model fit change from Model 2: R² change=.036; F Change=7.0; p<.01.
The strong association, however, was offset if the respondents were from a medium or large community college. Respondents from large and medium institutions did not see mission clarification as one of the benefits of strategic planning. This could very well be the result of the changing climate in which these types of community colleges operate in. Often times, large and medium sized community colleges are more likely than their smaller counterparts to stray away from their official mission and get involved in projects that may not fall within the institutionally adapted mission. In other words, respondents may have perceived more activities outside the traditional mission of the community college.

When other items of the plan were examined in conjunction with mission clarification, the negative perception of respondents at medium and large colleges began to temper. As model two of the regression analysis shows, if the strategic plan is clearly communicated to organizational members, organizational members are engaged in the strategic planning process, and the plan lays out a clear vision of the future, the negative perception was less pronounced.

These findings are supported by the literature. Recent strategic planning literature emphasizes the importance of wide participation in the strategic planning process and a process that sets clear organizational goals as well as objectives at lower levels (Plant 2010; Poister 2010).

Model two also shows that the perception of respondents working at medium sized institutions became statistically insignificant when all three items were incorporated in the strategic plan.

The analysis suggests that when it comes to the mission clarification benefit associated with strategic planning, the strategic plan has to be tailor made to fit the institution if indeed it is to be associated with improved mission clarification. The role one plays in the strategic planning
process did not seem to matter when the strategic plan incorporated items such as communication clarity, well defined strategic vision, and employee engagement.

Summary

The most fundamental question of strategic planning is whether the process can result in enhanced institutional performance. The regression models were developed to tease out which aspects of the strategic plan may positively influence respondents’ perceptions of improved institutional performance. The models suggested several interesting relationships between strategic planning and enhanced institutional performance.

First, compared to planners strategic plan implementers had positive perceptions about the strategic plan and enhanced institutional performance. Non-implementers tended to disagree that the strategic planning enhanced institutional performance. This result could have emerged because front line managers who are expected to carry out the brunt of the tasks associated with the strategic plan may be excluded from the important aspect of the strategic planning implementation.

The finding suggests two things. First, as indicated in the literature, (Bryson, 2010; Crosby, 2010 ) the relationship between strategic planning and performance is multidimensional. Given this, it is important to understand what aspects of the planning contribute to the perception of improved performance. In this case, the role one plays in the strategic planning process colors ones perception about the relationship between strategic planning and performance. Second, it suggests if community colleges involve more individuals in the implementation process, the strategic planning exercise might be more productive.
Recent literature (Plant, 2006) has argued for the structuring of the strategic planning process to actively engage front line staff as a way of aligning strategic planning and implementation. Doing this, it is argued, will lead to enhanced performance and organizational capacity.

Another relationship that the regression analysis teased out suggested that the strategic plan itself can influence perceptions of enhanced institutional performance. Respondents who agreed with certain features of the strategic plan, as measured by the items (Q6-Q10 and Q13), had higher scores on the perceived performance items. In addition, respondents who agreed that the strategic plan encouraged team goals tended to associate enhanced institutional performance with the strategic plan.

When institutional location was controlled for, the findings suggested that respondents associated with suburban colleges were more likely to see enhanced institutional performance as a result of the strategic planning.

The models suggested that if strategic plans are to contribute to enhanced institutional performance, planners should develop a clear strategic vision that lays out a vision to deal with future challenges, as well as form a basis for setting goals and plans of action. Positive performance perception may be further enhanced if the plan encourages teamwork with goals that reflect the mission of the school as well as expanding the role for employees to be involved with the plans implementation. Apparently, the more employees are engaged in making the plan work, the more likely they will perceive that their college works to meet its strategic plan goals.

The connection between mission and performance suggests the mission statement is more than just an organization’s way of telling the world what the organization’s objectives are. As described by several writers, (Bryson, 1995; Mintzberg, 1994; Wright, 2002) the mission and
connecting members to the organization. The mission statement is particularly important for institutions of higher education because it plays the critical role of balancing the “relationship between educational goals and the educational needs of the outside world” (Ferrari and Velcoff, 2006, p.244). Mission statements that are clearly articulated, understood, and embraced by organizational members are reported to result in effective strategic planning (Lujan and Dolence, 1997; Quigley and Murray, 2001).

These findings are supported by the recent literature that advocates viewing strategic planning as multidimensional (Bryson, Crosby & Bryson 2009). In a 2009 Bryson, Crosby and Bryson argued that strategic planning should not be viewed as a static process. Since strategic planning is a complex practice that encompasses various dimension including social and political, our attempt at understanding strategic planning and its linkages to organizational performance should accommodate the intricacies of strategic planning.

While Bryson suggests only qualitative approaches will help us understand the relationship between strategic planning and performance, the current study took an approach that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. The regression models used in the current study have identified the strategic plan dimensions that contribute towards realizing the organizational benefits of engaging in strategic planning.

Analysis of documents

Enhanced performance is at core of any strategic planning effort. Over the years, within the private sector, several studies have documented the linkages between strategic planning and organizational performance. Recently, several authors have made significant contributions to our understanding of strategic planning and performance in public organizations. The current study examined several documents to explore further the relationship between strategic planning
and performance within the community colleges in Maryland. While the perceived non-performance and performance related benefits were thoroughly analyzed using the data gathered through the questionnaire, the purpose of the document analysis was to supplement construct five; enhanced performance.

The documents examined include strategic plans, strategic plan performance reports, end of year progress reports, and annual institutional assessment reports from one of the community colleges that took part in the study.

All sixteen community colleges in Maryland submit annual performance reports to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), which in turn prepares a summary report for the state legislature.

Table 4-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Category</th>
<th>Number of Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility and Affordability</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and Effectiveness Student Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress and Achievement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Growth and Vitality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Development</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Outreach and Impact</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Use of Public Funding</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The performance reports submitted by the community colleges serve two purposes. First, all community colleges use the performance reports and the performance indicators to monitor and improve institutional effectiveness. Second, community college leaders use the performance reporting process to demonstrate accountability to accrediting bodies and state regulators.

Based on the indicators, the reports submitted to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) on a yearly basis, present trend in institutional performance over time. While the state submittal does not require comparisons with peer institutions, the community colleges use data submitted by their peers to compare their performance. To account for their uniqueness, some community colleges have developed institution specific additional performance indicators they track over time.

Specific examples of documents reviewed for the study showed that colleges make a concerted effort to tie strategic planning with performance indicators and use this process to enhance institutional performance. For example, a document examined from one of the community colleges stated:

“the college became a more intentional institution requiring greater college wide participation in planning and decision making”. The document goes on to state “the establishment of the strategic planning council has improved the understanding of the strategic planning process and increased the alignment of institutional and unit objectives with college wide strategic initiatives and goals”.

This suggests the strategic plan plays a role in aligning resources with strategic initiatives, which in turn could contribute to enhanced institutional performance. Wide participation in the strategic planning process has also been linked to effective strategic planning (Plant, 2010).
Another document examined also indicated that the colleges use performance measures for institutional renewal. The document, which is prepared annually, is a thorough study that measures how well the college adhered to the strategic plan and achieved its goals in the previous fiscal year. Findings from the study are presented to the college community and the governing board. While it is hard to determine whether such a report would have a direct impact on performance, it is easy to see that the reporting played a significant role in keeping the college on track and use resources effectively.

Yet another report examined for the study used benchmarking for comparing the college’s progress with a select group of peer institutions. As stated in the document, the peer groups were selected on similar characteristics including enrollment and location. Again, this may or may not have improved institutional performance. What is clear from this exercise is the institution paid close attention to performance and aligning strategic objectives in the plan to key performance indicators.

At one college, according to the document examined, the responsibility for performance enhancement was assigned to individuals for particular areas. Starting with the president who is accountable to the board of trustees, the accountability structure goes down to the vice presidents who are responsible to the president. The activities that were consistent with the college’s mission and strategic initiatives were assigned to individuals who are identified as “plan facilitators”. Each plan facilitator was also responsible for reporting the progress achieved by each strategic initiative.

One of the largest community college’s in the system used end of year progress reports to measure plan achievement. The purpose of the report, as stated in the document,” is to provide
detailed information on progress made toward achieving scheduled actions associated with the strategic goals of the plan and to assess the extent to which progress was made”.

The report shows that out of the one hundred thirty-three strategic plan actions that were scheduled for fiscal year 2007, one hundred (75%) were completed. The remaining actions were classified as still in progress (25%) or could not be completed (2%). While it is hard to determine the level of enhanced institutional performance achieved, the report clearly indicated the level of commitment at the institution towards achieving plan goals. As the literature suggests there are benefits that result just from engaging in strategic planning. When the strategic plan is actually implemented, its effect on the organization is well documented in the literature. In this particular college’s case, not all the strategic plan actions were implemented. Even if they are not all implemented, however, the strategic planning process still matters. As Bryson (1995, 2004, & 2010) puts it, planning is not limited to plans; planning is also about the patterns of thinking that best match resources and capabilities to achieving desired outcomes. Similarly, if the planners are engaged in strategic thinking, are strategically minded, they are more likely to be prepared to respond to unexpected events in the environment.

To further explore the relationship between strategic planning and performance, selected measurable indictors associated with strategic plan goals and used by one of the largest community colleges in the Maryland system were examined to determine if positive movements in the indicators were realized. The report provides a series of data points spanning over multiple fiscal years. The data points are presented in graphical charts to track the trends and monitor the progress of the specific performance indicators against the established targets. The performance measures align with the objectives identified in the strategic plan.
The performance indicators examined include average expenditure per student, percentage of expenditure on instruction, reallocations due to cost containment, faculty and staff satisfaction with participatory governance and decision making, employee satisfaction that actions of the institution reflects its mission, efficiency of college’s policies, procedures and systems, fund balance preservation, employee satisfaction with college decision making processes, communication and organizational structure, second year retention of full and part time students, and graduation / transfer rates after four years.

All the indicators examined were tied to a particular strategic planning goal and the desired target for the indicator were specified. For example, the indicator average expenditure per full time equivalent student was tied strategic plan objective fiscal responsibility and effective use of resources. The target for this particular was set as the college’s annual growth in cost per FTE should not 10% in any given year. An examination of data for fiscal years 1996 to 2007 shows that the college had managed to keep cost per FTE under the established target.

Another strategic plan objective, student progress and success employs several indicators to measure strategic goal achievement. One of the indicators used with this particular strategic plan objective is second year retention rate. The desired outcome for this indicator states the college will achieve or surpass a fall to fall retention rate of 61% for all students. The examined data shows that the college has surpassed the target by at least five percentage points.

Similar achievement patterns were noted for the other indicators examined. The pattern suggests that the strategic plan played a role in achieving enhanced performance. The quantitative analysis also showed that respondents perceived enhanced organizational performance as strategic planning benefit when the strategic plan included performance indicators.
The examined documents showed that the community colleges measured their performance quantitatively. They tracked how well they were doing in meeting the agreed upon quantitative performance targets all community colleges use. Some community colleges have tied the measures to their strategic plans. This activity has helped the community colleges determine whether they were meeting their goals and whether there were strategic plan adjustments that they needed to make.

A common theme that runs through all the documents examined was the qualitative aspects of enhanced performance. The reports indicated that the numbers associated with performance during a given fiscal year did not paint a complete picture. There were other qualitative outcomes associated with the strategic plan. A good example of this is, carrying strategic plan recommendations from previous years to the current strategic plan. Another commonly mentioned theme in the reports was improved institutional operations.

The reports demonstrated that community colleges in Maryland use key performance indicators to measure performance over time. Some community colleges use strategic planning progress reports to track the achievement of the strategic plan goals. The progress reports use both quantitative and qualitative measures to gauge achievement. Again, while this does not demonstrate the impact of the strategic plan on performance, it shows that community colleges measure how much of what they set out to accomplish at the beginning of the planning process at various intervals.

The regular reporting of performance indicators provides the necessary information to make the necessary adjustments to the strategic plan. The integration of strategic planning and performance measurement by the community colleges in Maryland contributes to their enhanced
performance by increasing the understanding of the strategic planning and performance measurement. A key feature of an effective strategic plan is the performance measures associated with the plan’s strategic goals. The identification of variances between the strategic goals and the actual achieved performance is one way of measuring the strategic plans impact on organizational performance.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The research focused on the perceived benefits community colleges derived from engaging in strategic planning. The data for the study was obtained from a survey of community college personnel who had knowledge of the strategic planning process at their respective institutions. Based on the literature, the survey questions were organized around the organizational benefits associated with engaging in strategic planning. These include improved communication, better team work, a better understanding of the organization, strategic thinking and acting, and enhanced performance. The ultimate benefit of strategic planning is enhanced organizational performance.

To gain a deeper understanding of strategic planning and organizational performance, in addition to the survey data, several planning related documents from the community colleges were thoroughly studied. The documents examined include, strategic plans, end of year progress reports, and the annual performance report community colleges are required to submit to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). All community colleges report on the same thirty two key performance indicators that are organized around five mission mandates. These include access and affordability, diversity, economic growth and vitality, workforce development, community outreach and impact and effect use of public funding.

Results from the study unraveled several findings that are supported by the literature. Strategic planning, within the community college environment in Maryland, is a complex process that requires leadership and broad participation. It also revealed that the benefits associated with strategic planning are perceived differently by the study participants depending
on their institution and role played in the strategic planning process. While study participants saw linkages between strategic planning and performance, other organizational aspects associated with the process of strategic planning played a significant role in shaping their perception of the relationship between strategic planning and enhanced performance.

Summary of findings

Strategic Thinking and Acting

One of the benefits of engaging in strategic planning is the promotion of strategic thinking and acting (Heracleous 1998; Mintzberg 1994; Khazaei 2009; Bryson 2003, 2010). Mintzberg suggests strategic thinking leads to better strategies. Bryson includes several examples associated with strategic thinking. These include “clarifying mission”, “figuring out what strategies are best” and “negotiating performance measures”. Bryson goes as far as saying “any strategic planning process is worthwhile only of it helps key decision makers think and act strategically” (Bryson 2003, p.46).

The analysis revealed the benefit strategic thinking and acting was perceived differently depending on the size and location of the institution. Respondents at the small community colleges perceived strategic thinking and acting as a benefit of strategic planning. In addition, respondents from rural community colleges associated enhanced strategic vision with engaging in strategic planning. While strategic thinking and acting was not perceived to be a benefit associated with engaging in strategic planning by all Maryland community colleges, it was seen as a benefit by a segment of the community colleges. The methodology employed in the study was able to identify the dimensionality of the strategic plan and what aspects of the process are associated with a given benefit.
Better Understanding of the College

Better understanding of the college means members of the college community have an understanding of why the college exists. The literature suggests the development and implementation of the strategic plan enhances organizational members’ understanding of the organization. Further, the literature suggests strategic planning helps to clearly define the purpose of the organization and to establish goals and objectives consistent with that mission in a defined time frame within the organization’s capacity for implementation (Bryson and Crosby 2000; Hendrick 2003; Bryson 2010; Plant 2009;)

The findings suggest the respondent’s at large and medium institutions were more likely to associate better understanding of the college as a definite benefit associated with engaging in strategic planning. The role one played in the strategic planning process was a moderating factor in the construct better understanding of the college. Individual involved in implementing the strategic plan tended to agree or strongly agree that engaging in strategic planning resulted in a better understanding of the college. This finding suggests community colleges might be better served by their strategic plans if they involve more individuals in strategic planning activities.

Teamwork

Teamwork is one of the benefits of engaging in strategic planning. Bryson (2010) associates this benefit with what he terms “enhanced organizational effectiveness, responsiveness and resilience” (Bryson 2010). Others have suggested that since public organizations have transformed from “rule driven bureaucracies” to horizontally linked “organizations, the strategic planning has to be team based (Plant 2010). By working together in
envisioning the organization’s future, organizational members experience an enhanced sense of teamwork and commitment. This in turn leads to better implementation of the strategic plan.

The study found that teamwork as a benefit of engaging in strategic planning was perceived differently when examined in conjunction with institutional size and location. A larger proportion of respondents from small community colleges and respondents from rural community colleges perceived enhanced teamwork as a benefit of strategic planning. This suggests building teams in the larger organizations might be a difficult proposal.

Communication

Another benefit associated with engaging in strategic planning is enhanced communication. In order for the plan to be effectively implemented, organizational members need to communicate and work together as a team. Communication leads to “improved overall coordination and integration” (Bryson 2010)

The current research found that study participants who were involved in both crafting and implementing the strategic plan had significantly higher mean scores on the perceived benefit of communication quality. Proportionately higher percentages of both planners and implementers agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic plan enhanced communication quality.

Enhanced Performance

The strategic planning literature suggests that engaging in strategic planning leads to enhanced performance (Poister and Streib 2005; Kelman and Meyers; Bryson, Crosby and Bryson 2009; Bryson 2010).
The study found that the perception about strategic planning and enhanced organizational performance of study participants who were involved in implementing the strategic plan was more positive.

Other organizational capacity elements associated with the strategic planning process were also instrumental in shaping the respondents perceptions about strategic planning and enhanced organizational performance. Respondents who felt the strategic planning process encouraged team goals incorporated a clear strategic vision, were future oriented, and focused on handling future eventualities were more likely to associate enhanced performance with engaging in strategic planning.

Conclusions

The strategic planning literature reviewed for the study includes writers whose views of strategic planning range from scrap the whole thing (Mintzberg) to those who suggest that strategic planning is here to stay (Bryson). The early literature questioned the usefulness of strategic planning as a management tool. In fact, Mintzberg argues that strategic planning is too restrictive making organizational adaptability impossible. According to Mintzberg, one of the major weaknesses of strategic planning has to do with the processes inability to produce effective strategies. Mintzberg argues strategic planning cannot produce strategies because it is a formalized and programmatic process.

Writers such as Bryson take a very different view of strategic planning. This contending view suggests that strategic planning will continue to be a vital tool in public and nonprofit organizations. As Bryson puts it, “my guess is that the production of positive results will continue and that the magnitude of the effects across populations of government and nonprofits
will increase incrementally over the next 10 years as experience with strategic planning grows, and as pertinent and useful research also increases (Bryson, 2010).

The current study’s findings are in line with Bryson’s views about the future of strategic planning in public organizations. The findings suggest that Maryland community college study participants associate several organizational capacity improvements with developing and implementing strategic planning. At the heart of this is the perception of improved performance associated with strategic planning. The findings from the study suggest that the perception of strategic planning and improved organizational performance is shaped by other elements that are associated with the strategic planning process. Among these include a clear vision and a clear purpose.

The findings also suggest broad participation as another element that influenced study participants’ perception about strategic planning and enhanced organizational performance. Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the strategic planning process involved the wide participation of the college community, associated enhanced institutional performance as a benefit of strategic planning. As suggested by the literature, broad participation leads to a sense of ownership of the plan. In the higher education environment, the strategic planning process requires wide involvement from all segments of the college community and it is important to develop of ownership in the process. This finding is supported by the literature. Plant in a recent article argues “to achieve the overall goal of improved performance, the whole organization should be involved in strategic planning” (2010).

The documents examined as part of the study clearly indicated that the colleges that participated in the study used performance indicators to measure and track plan goal
achievements. The document analysis suggested that there is a belief performance indicators can enhance institutional improvement. The use of longitudinal performance indicators that are benchmarked figured prominently in the strategic planning process.

The strategic plans examined for the study show that for each strategic goal, there are indicators that show the performance of the college in attaining the strategic planning goal. For example, a document entitled “End of Year Progress Report” quantified plan goal achievements in terms of percentages. The document clearly showed improvement or decline in performance over time of a given indicator associated with the strategic plan. The intent of the reporting process was to institutionalize strategic planning as a process planning, evaluating, and making improvements based on the evaluations.

A memo to plan developers at one of the colleges states “Develop balanced sets of performance indicators to measure the progress of your strategic plan. Select as many indicators of input, output, outcome, efficiency, and quality as needed to tell a complete performance story; but, you must have at least one outcome-based indicator for each program activity. Use the performance indicator matrix at the end of these guidelines as a tool to develop balanced sets of indicators”.

From the documents examined, it was also clear that the colleges assigned individuals responsibility for action plan implementation. These individuals were responsible for reporting into a system that monitored strategic planning progress. Implementation figures prominently in the strategic planning process.

Despite the opposition to strategic planning in the earlier literature, experience, practice, and the recent literature show that strategic planning will continue to be practiced widely in
public organizations including community colleges in Maryland. There are several impetuses for this. Primarily, the challenges community colleges have to continuously deal will make strategic planning a relevant management tool to deal with the challenges. In addition to the fiscal challenges community colleges have to deal with, the accountability movement and accreditation will continue to put the pressure on community colleges to undertake strategic planning. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the accrediting body of all community colleges in Maryland, requires strategic planning as part of the accreditation and reaffirmation process.

If strategic planning is to benefit the community colleges in dealing with both the internal and external challenges and bringing about a desired future it has to be crafted carefully to fit the culture of the organization it is intended to serve. The study suggests that there is no single approach to strategic planning. The framework as well as the process of planning must work for the particular institution.

The findings from the study also clearly suggest that the strategic planning process itself is very beneficial to the institutions engaged in strategic planning. Community colleges in Maryland spend a considerable amount of time in creating strategic planning committees, deliberating on the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions, and coming up with the goals, objectives, strategies, and measures of success of the strategic plan. This institutional process can lead to commonly shared views, build consensus, and buy in into the plan.

Another finding suggests the importance of communication in the strategic planning process. In community colleges where shared governance is part of the organizational culture, the purpose of the strategic planning has to be widely communicated throughout the institution. Without careful broad based communication, there is a good chance that strategic planning will
be met with resistance by segments of the college community who feel left out. The
communication requires attention to each group likely to be affected by the planning process and
the plan’s goals. Organizational members will perceive the strategic plan as beneficial if they
know why the strategic plan is being undertaken and what the associated benefits are.
Communication is key to the success of the strategic planning.

Within the community college environment, the strategic planning process requires wide
participation and involvement. Given this reality, it is important to establish and maintain broad
based ownership of the strategic planning process and the strategic plan among all stakeholders.
Ownership of the process and the strategic plan by a wide array of stakeholders results in
commitment to the implementation and success of the strategic plan.

Since strategic planning within higher education requires the involvement of several
stakeholder groups, it is important to incorporate a process of implementing the plan. From the
review of the documents, it was clear that implementation is a critical component of the plan.
However, the limited number of individuals assigned with the task of implementing the plan
makes the process cumbersome. The colleges will be well served and garner more benefits from
the strategic planning effort if they increase the number of individuals directly responsible for
implementing the strategic plan. Implementing involves assigning responsibility for specific
goals.

The study suggests that the perception of a beneficial strategic plan is associated with one
that provides clear priorities for the institution. Given this, community colleges cannot be all
things to all people. A strategic plan has to help the institution allocate limited resources among
competing priorities if it is to serve as an effective management tool.
Attention to assessment was perceived as a key ingredient of a beneficial strategic plan. The community colleges spend a considerable amount of time monitoring the strategic plan’s progress and measure its outcomes. The assessment provides guidance for developing monitoring the planning process, and judging whether a particular plan’s activities and strategies are successful in fulfilling the established goals. The annual progress report is part of this monitoring process. The report serves as communication tool to the stakeholders about the progress made and what more needs to be done and what needs to be modified.

Strategic planning is a complex and time-consuming undertaking and should not be viewed as a quick fix for the myriad of internal and external challenges community colleges in Maryland have to deal with. When developed carefully with broad participation and measurable performance indicators and effectively implemented, it can be an effective management tool that can yield positive results.

Directions for future research

The study was limited to community colleges in Maryland. Even though all community colleges were invited to participate in the study, not all the colleges chose to do so. Given the limited sample of community colleges that participated in the study, the results of the study may not be generalizable to all community colleges in the United States. In addition, there was a lack of empirical studies focusing on strategic planning and enhanced organizational performance within higher education and it is difficult to compare the study findings with other studies conducted in the past.
While the study has established a link to strategic planning and the associated benefits identified in the literature including enhance organizational performance, and provided evidence of the presence of other mediating factors such as the incorporation of strategic vision, team work, clear mission and future orientation, more work to explore the underlying reasons why and how strategic planning improves performance in institutions of higher education can add to our understanding of the linkages between enhanced performance and engaging in strategic planning.

The current study employed qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand the perceived benefits of strategic planning. The qualitative aspect of the study was limited to the examining of public documents related to strategic planning the community colleges prepare to meet several reporting and accountability demands from accrediting bodies and the state. Including interview data would further enrich the study and the resulting findings. The interview will simply ask informants if strategic planning improves organizational performance, how, and why.

The study of the linkages of strategic planning and the associated benefits institutions of higher education derive can benefit from expanding the sample to include more community colleges to provide data to further study the benefit of strategic planning. The study will be more informative if four-year institutions are included in the sample. Analyzing the perceived benefits of strategic planning by type of institution will be informative and contribute to the literature in a major way.
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Green, J. L., Mayyar, D.P., and Ruch, R.S. (1979). Strategic Planning and Budgeting for Higher Education. La Jolla, California, J.L.Green and Associates.


APPENDIX A

Strategic Planning Survey of Maryland Community College Personnel

Q1 Were you involved in the planning process
   □ Yes
   □ No
   If yes, what was your role in the planning process?

Q2 Were you involved in the implementation of the plan?
   □ Yes
   □ No
   If yes, what was your role in the implementation process?

Q3 What is your current position at the college?
   □ CEO
   □ Administrator
   □ Faculty
   □ Staff
   □ Student

Q4 How long have you been associated with the college
   □ 0-5 years
   □ 6-10 years
   □ 11-15 years
   □ 16-20 years
   □ 20-25 years
   □ More than 25 years

Q5 How did you become aware of your college's strategic plan?
   □ Involved in the planning process
   □ Staff meeting
   □ Copy of plan provided
   □ Formal presentation
   □ Other
   If other please specify

Location Which of these best describes the location of your college?
   □ Urban
   □ Suburban
   □ Rural

Size Which of these best describes the size of your college?
   □ Large
   □ Medium
   □ Small
I. Strategic Thinking and Acting

Q6 Administrative decision making is governed by the strategic plan
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

Q7 The strategic plan has contributed to the college's ability to think about its future and plan for it.
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

Q8 The strategic plan has contributed to the college's ability to properly appraise its strengths
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

Q9 The strategic plan has contributed to the college's ability to properly appraise its weaknesses
   - Strongly agree
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly disagree

Q10 The strategic plan has contributed to the college's ability to clarify its priorities.
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree

Q11 The strategic plan has given me the opportunity to exercise independent thought and action
    - Strongly agree
    - Agree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Disagree
    - Strongly disagree
Q12 The strategic plan has resulted in employees exercising a high degree of initiative
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Q13 The strategic plan has prepared the college to respond to trends or events that are on the horizon
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Q14 The strategic plan has encouraged creativity in implementing goals and strategies
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Q15 The benefits of the strategic plan are greater than the costs associated with its development
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

II. Better Understanding of the College

Q16 I am better able to express what the college stands for as a result of the strategic plan
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Q17 The strategic plan helps organizational members understand what is unique about this college compared to other community colleges
   □ Strongly agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree
Q18  People in the college know what needs to be done, where, and by whom as a result of the strategic plan
    ■ Strongly agree
    ■ Agree
    ■ Neither agree nor disagree
    ■ Disagree
    ■ Strongly disagree

Q19  The college community has a better understanding of the college's goals as a result of the strategic plan
    ■ Strongly agree
    ■ Agree
    ■ Neither agree nor disagree
    ■ Disagree
    ■ Strongly disagree

Q20  The strategic plan is an accurate reflection of the college and is congruent with our ideas of what the college represents
    ■ Strongly agree
    ■ Agree
    ■ Neither agree nor disagree
    ■ Disagree
    ■ Strongly disagree

Q21  The strategic plan fosters a clear understanding of the role of the community college in society
    ■ Strongly agree
    ■ Agree
    ■ Neither agree nor disagree
    ■ Disagree
    ■ Strongly disagree

III. Team work

Q22  The college community works together with a greater degree of cooperation and coordinated effort since the introduction of the strategic plan
    ■ Strongly agree
    ■ Agree
    ■ Neither agree nor disagree
    ■ Disagree
    ■ Strongly disagree

Q23  The strategic plan has created two cultures in the college--one for administrators and one for staff
    ■ Strongly agree
    ■ Agree
    ■ Neither agree nor disagree
    ■ Disagree
    ■ Strongly disagree
Q24  Team goals are encouraged in the college as a result of the strategic plan
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q25  As a result of the strategic plan, the college's leadership style has become more participatory
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q26  As a result of the strategic plan, the college has become more collegial and empowered
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q27  As a result of the strategic plan, a feeling of community and mutual support exists in the college.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

IV. Communication

Q28  The introduction of the strategic plan was clearly communicated
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q29  Long term goals and strategies of the plan have been clearly communicated to the college community
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
Q30 Since the implementation of the strategic plan, I am encouraged to share and exchange
   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Q31 Since the implementation of the strategic plan, feedback is received in a timely manner
   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Q32 Clear directions regarding who is responsible for implementing goals and objectives of the plan have been provided to employees
   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Q33 As a result of the implementation of the strategic plan, communication within the college both vertically and horizontally has improved
   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

Q34 As a result of the implementation of the strategic plan, collaboration throughout the college has improved
   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree

V. Institutional Performance

Q35 The strategic plan is linked to institutional performance indicators
   □ Strongly Agree
   □ Agree
   □ Neither agree nor disagree
   □ Disagree
   □ Strongly disagree
Q36 The college's key performance indicators have improved as a result of the strategic plan
  □ Strongly Agree
  □ Agree
  □ Neither agree nor disagree
  □ Disagree
  □ Strongly disagree

Q37 This college's performance is better than other community colleges not engaged in strategic planning
  □ Strongly Agree
  □ Agree
  □ Neither agree nor disagree
  □ Disagree
  □ Strongly disagree

Comments:
### APPENDIX B

#### Key Summary Scales in Study by Location and Size of Respondent's Institution (N=98)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Scale</th>
<th>Key Items Included</th>
<th>Response Approximation</th>
<th>Institution Location</th>
<th>Institution Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>Q28, Q29, Q30, Q32</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
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<td>1.84</td>
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<td>Clarity</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Agree</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
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<td>Employee</td>
<td>Q11, Q12, Q14, Q15</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>37.5%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Q25, Q26, Q27</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
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<td>1.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture₂</td>
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<td>Does Not Agree</td>
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<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Agree</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Goals</td>
<td>Q24</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specified In Plan₁,₂</td>
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<td>Does Not Agree</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Agree</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission Clarification₁,₂</td>
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<td>12.5%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived</td>
<td>Q20, Q21, Q35, Q36, Q37</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.89</td>
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<td>Institutional</td>
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<td>Does Not Agree</td>
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<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
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<td>25.0%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
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<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N)</td>
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<td>(8)</td>
<td>(63)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*Mean score on a three point scale from 1 ("does not agree") to 3 ("strongly agree").

For the purposes of this table, the multi-item scale scores were re-classified into three categories with mean scores for each category approximating original questionnaire coding of individual items.

1. The chi-square test for this scale with institution location was statistically significant at p≤.05.
2. The chi-square test for this scale with institution size was statistically significant at p≤.05.
3. Statistically significant mean difference for these two categories (two-tailed t-test at p≤.05).
### APPENDIX C

**Key Summary Scales in Study by Strategic Planning Role of Respondents (N=98)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Scale</th>
<th>Key Items Included</th>
<th>Mean Score(^a) / Response Approximation(^b)</th>
<th>Involved in Planning Process</th>
<th>Implemented Plan</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicative Clarity</strong></td>
<td>Q28, Q29, Q30, Q32</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does Not Agree</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication Quality</strong></td>
<td>Q31, Q33, Q34</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>1.36(_2)</td>
<td>1.79(_2)</td>
<td>1.35(_2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does Not Agree</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Vision</strong></td>
<td>Q6, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q13</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.65(_2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does Not Agree</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee Engagement(_1)</strong></td>
<td>Q11, Q12, Q14, Q15</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.47(_2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Does Not Agree</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>58.8%(_3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teamwork Culture</strong></td>
<td>Q25, Q26, Q27</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does Not Agree</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Agree</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team Goals Specified In Plan</strong></td>
<td>Q24</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.53</td>
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<td>Does Not Agree</td>
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<td>39.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improved Mission Clarification</strong></td>
<td>Q16, Q17, Q18, Q19</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does Not Agree</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived Institutional Performance Enhancement(_1)</strong></td>
<td>Q20, Q21, Q35, Q36, Q37</td>
<td>Mean Score</td>
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<td>1.87</td>
<td>1.24(_2)</td>
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<td>82.4%(_3)</td>
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<td>36.9%</td>
<td>11.8%(_3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>(84)</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>(81)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Mean score on a three point scale from 1 ("does not agree") to 3 ("strongly agree").

\(^b\)For the purposes of this table, the multi-item scale scores were re-classified into three categories with mean scores for each category approximating original questionnaire coding of individual items.

\(_1\)The chi-square test for this scale with the implementer role was statistically significant at p≤.05.

\(_2\)Statistically significant mean difference for these two categories (two-tailed t-test at p≤.05).

\(_3\)Statistically significant proportional difference between these two categories for this response (two-sided z-test at p≤.05).