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Leading Through Ambiguity: A Phenomenological Examination of Chief Diversity Officers

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of chief diversity officers (CDOs) with leading through ambiguity in their roles. It is critical to provide support and structure to senior-level administrators leading diversity efforts at colleges and universities. "Ambiguity," for the purposes of my study and main research question, relates to a CDO's experience with an ill-defined organizational structure that governs their role. A qualitative phenomenological study was employed to document the experiences of 14 CDOs in higher education. Open-ended interviews facilitated capturing the essence of the lived experiences of CDOs leading despite the ambiguity in their roles. The data analysis for this study was accomplished by utilizing the method of Moustakas (1994) which helped generate four themes: (a) ambiguity in the CDO position, (b) resources necessary for success in the CDO position, (c) resistance on campus toward the CDO position, and (d) personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position. Themes identified in this study could better equip higher education presidents, current CDOs, and aspiring CDOs to better understand the role.

Keywords: chief diversity officers (CDOs), diversity, inclusion, senior-level, administration, support, resources

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my best friends, my colleagues, and especially, to my family. My wife Morgen, for her love and support during this journey. I appreciate your patience and understanding while I pursued this doctorate. My sons Shawn and Corey, it has been a joy to be your father and I hope that you both live out your dreams. My father Richard, who fought for me when the other guy did not want to. I love you with all my heart. My mother Gretchen, for her love through our storms in life. My sister Toniette, a person that I have always look up to. I am thankful for her being my saving grace. My brother-in-law Carl, when I was 10 years old, you believed I could be a doctor, when I did not believe in myself. I love you, bro. To all my extended family, friends, and CU-P peers, thank you for all your support and positive vibes in this chapter in my life. Lastly, I want to dedicate this educational experience to my angel in heaven, my maternal grandmother, Lendora “Tom” Johnson. I know you are always watching over me with the grace and love of God’s favor in my life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Higher educational institutions operate throughout the United States within a social sphere that is closely tied to historic, painful inequalities. Their larger cultural framework comprises a connection to the nation and its influence on higher education. Diversity has a powerful presence at some colleges and universities in the United States where historical context is fraught with discrimination and oppressive practices.

Introduction to the Problem

In the past, no fewer than 40 institutions have established new executive-level CDO positions to centralize diversity functions, improve inclusion, and integrate diversity more fully (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). CDOs are executives who are responsible for institutional diversity at colleges or universities in the U.S. Each CDO has a unique background, unique experiences, and a unique career path (Gose, 2006; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Despite having a variety of academic backgrounds, the knowledge that CDOs construct while on the job is most important to their abilities to be effective diversity executives. Gaining knowledge while on-the-job is the primary mode for CDOs' learning given the common absence of a degree or certification for diversity executives (Williams, 2013).

The CDO position is a somewhat new but quickly growing higher education administrative leadership role (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). "Standards of practice that are responsive to the dynamic landscape of higher education will help to advance the professionalization of the CDO role as it relates to serving the increasingly diverse demographics of our nation" (Worthington, Stanley, & Lewis, 2014, p. 229). This ascending administrative role grew from arguments over initiatives of change in recruiting, admitting, and hiring practices and as an answer to higher educational institutions facing diversity-related controversies (Banerji, 2005). Given this

ascension, the organizational construct of the CDO position is important to understand because it explains how the CDO functions within the university (Leon, 2014).

CDOs are positioned in different institutional areas, reaching from student and academic affairs to human resources to operational institutional offices. Parker (2015) found that CDOs either have power over large institutional units with moderate staff sizes and substantial budgets or supervise minor units with fewer staff. At times, a direct line connects an institution's president to a CDO, while other CDOs are directed by an intermediate person (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). "This structural ambiguity is an important issue because it relates to these institutions' capacity to maintain diverse, inclusive, and welcoming environments for all students, faculty, and staff" (Parker, 2015, p. 22). According to Williams and Wade-Golden (2013), more than any other aspect of the CDO position, vertical structuring is most critical and, at times, can be contentious. Providing good position structure within an institution will increase leadership capacity and counteract failed efforts from the past surrounding diversity (Williams, 2013).

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

Background. Throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, when higher education became more accessible to people of color and women, minority affairs offices were established to help students make the transition into White male-dominated institutions (Williams, 2013). During this part of the century, the need for change was slowly impacting greater society and, essentially, elements of CDO work were created. Early diversity officers were assigned the job of enhancing the compositional diversity of a university's student body and faculty (Banjeri, 2005). Compositional diversity refers to the numerical and proportional representation of different groups of people within the campus environment (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). The goals of these efforts were to remediate and eliminate discrimination among federally protected identities (Williams & Clowney, 2007).

Context. Many of these early positions and minority offices were relegated to institutional margins and were tasked with working on low compositional diversity (Barcelo, 2007). This initial phase of structural growth created productive stress and provided chances for significant collaboration. In certain situations, the stress ignited student resistance and activism. This movement also revealed the need for expanded resource support: human and financial support for campus cultural change (Nixon, 2017). At various colleges and universities, diversity advances have fallen short because of disconnected efforts. What has been missing is a committed cross-campus bond with energies for diversity-related change, which, subsequently, has created ambiguity in diversity appointments (Milem, Chang, & Lising-Antonio, 2005).

History. For higher educational institutions to take full advantage of movement toward valuing diversity, structures and support must be put in place to not only create a symbol but also to create procedural organization in the CDO position. The role of CDO in higher education has existed in some type or form since the 1970s with different views regarding the position's justification, which has caused questions about why the position was needed in higher education (Nixon, 2017; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008). At times, the CDO role was about pleasing a population of students or stakeholders on campus. One historic myth about the CDO comprised them acting as a "diversity messiah" for the campus and administration (Coopwood & Lewis Jr., 2017; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008, 2013).

Conceptual framework for the problem. This qualitative study examines CDOs through four concepts: diversity, institutional change, institutional power, and collaboration as well as ambiguity related to the organizational structure of the CDOs' role in higher education. CDOs can provide understanding of their own experiences and signs or patterns of how the role in higher education could operate or be structured as a template future implementation of the CDO position on other campuses. The ambiguity of CDOs' work in higher education needs further exploration

for inclusive excellence and mindfulness in CDO organizational structure (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). College and university communities must understand the perspectives of CDOs to be better equipped to support the roles of CDOs. CDOs have noted that poorly constructed positions hinder the accomplishment of their tasks as well as their successes, lacking a bond in the structure of their roles necessary for ascension (Leon, 2014). Knowing the stories of the people that have been operating in the roles of CDOs allows others to construct a critical plan for creating institutional change, crafting organizational structures and practices that increase the credibility of the higher education CDOs among senior administration officials and entire institutions.

Statement of the Problem

The problem studied in this dissertation is the ambiguity in the organizational structure of higher education CDO positions. "At the nation's colleges and universities, there exists an ambiguous and inconsistent formalized structure regarding institutional diversity leadership, particularly relating to the foremost administrative leaders who oversee and manage campus diversity" (Parker, 2015, p. 21). The ambiguity in higher education CDO positions is challenging because of its potential negative impact on CDOs' abilities to be active administrators (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). A current CDO administrator has the perceived mission to increase institutional diversity efforts by increasing access, building international relationships, improving curriculum, and other actions (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). The problem stems from higher education institutions not knowing how to set up an organizational design process for the role, which leads to ambiguity in creating responsibilities for the role (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand CDOs' experiences in higher education. The information was collected from CDOs' lived experiences by examining

organizational structures and support perspectives. Recent advancements have been made to make colleges and universities more inclusive—attracting more students from diverse backgrounds—but administrators must address multiple related issues. Institutional issues include access and success, campus climate, academics, and viability. These issues facing higher education institutions require a focus on diversity leadership. Wilson (2013) noted that CDOs can be leaders within an institution's president's cabinet who can plan, direct, and enhance formal diversity efforts for institutional vitality. Perez (2013) suggested hiring a CDO as a method to help stakeholders at colleges and universities in making progress around diversity change on campus; a CDO's positive impact could extend to overseeing efforts where institutions may have struggled in areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Researchers have found that to become successful in advancing diversity with CDOs, institutions need to examine the support and structure of the CDO role for their institution (Perez, 2013; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Research Questions

The main research question for this phenomenological study was as follows: How do higher education CDOs describe their experiences with ambiguity in the organizational structure of their roles? "Ambiguity," for the purposes of this study and main research question, relates to a CDO's experience with an ill-defined organizational structure that governs their role. According to Nixon (2017), senior-level diversity administrator or CDO organizational structure differs from higher education institution to higher education institution. Leon (2014) noted that poorly structured CDO positions continue to create barriers at many higher education institutions.

Research subquestions. The following subquestions guided the examination of specific aspects of ambiguity in the CDO role.

- How do CDOs describe ambiguity in the organizational structure of their roles?

- How do CDOs enact the requirements of their positions while working within ambiguous organizational structures?
- What professional and personal characteristics help CDOs work within ambiguous organizational structures?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Rationale. There are limited studies, past or present, with a focus on CDOs' experiences, attitudes, organizational perceptions, and skill development (Coopwood & Lewis Jr., 2017; Jaschik, 2011; Leon, 2010; Nixon, 2017; Pittard, 2010). It is important to engage with and extend the literature that addresses the highlights and challenges of CDOs through their own perspectives. Historically, diversity leadership has relied on an awareness of power, influence, community dynamics, politics, and values (Nixon, 2017); however, it is not enough to simply be a symbol of diversity leadership. College stakeholders need to support CDOs in changing campus policies and landscapes. This study is important not only to create conversations about CDO work but also to strategize how to better utilize the position and formalize the role's structure. College stakeholders have unique challenges and opportunities that must be measured if the diversity leadership opportunities they present are to be maximized (Chang, 2011).

Relevance. Many college stakeholders have made efforts around diversity, but few institutions have *achieved* diversity goals, with many still struggling to link diversity and educational quality on their campuses (Leon, 2014). This study is relevant for college stakeholders continuing their investment in strategic diversity goals and having leadership in place to achieve their goals. Diversity is a constantly questioned issue on campuses; hence, CDOs must justify why being an inclusive and equitable campus community is vital, while additionally confronting challenges of changing social and political climates. Consider the challenges of diversity in the history of U.S. higher education; CDOs have often faced criticism from privileged voices who see

diversity support programs and services as special treatment, entitlement programs, and/or tangential to the educational enterprise of U.S. higher education (Jaschik, 2011; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). As more CDO roles are created on college campuses, this study will become a critical resource for individuals who are striving to become CDOs and for institutions in need of CDOs to provide quality diversity leadership.

Significance of the study. The role of a CDO is to sustainably connect diversity efforts at an institution. "In this context, sustainability, broadly defined, requires communities to increase their understanding that certain practices may have disparate impact on individuals from different groups" (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012, p. 30). In formalizing a commitment to diversity, a CDO confronts the challenge of requesting that campus community members have that same commitment to diversity. Each CDO depends on the influence approved by their role with the hope of becoming a holistic resource who enacts initiatives for difference (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Arnold and Kowalski-Braun (2012) claimed that institutional influence on a campus community will help CDOs with creating institutional change for diversity.

Definition of Terms

There are several key terms that were used throughout this study; thus, the following definitions will assist readers:

Ambiguity. Change efforts that leads to either being justified or attacked as illegitimate (Davalos, 2014).

Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). This term will refer to the higher education executive level position responsible for setting and/or leading a campus's diversity agenda or strategic plan for diversity (Williams, 2013; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

Collaboration. This term will refer to a concerted attempt by campus stakeholders to integrate diversity into the structure, culture, and fabric of the institution (Kezar, 2007).

Diversity. This term refers to human difference. It will also commonly relate to "structural diversity," whereby "diversity" will be quantified in terms of numbers of specific minority groups (Williams, 2013).

Equity. The elimination of overt barriers of exclusion to higher education (William & Clowney, 2007).

Inclusion. Political and cultural transformations from expanding concepts of diversity beyond racial and ethnic lines (William & Clowney, 2007).

Institutional power. This term will refer to a process for establishing a standard practice or custom in an organizational system (Curry, 1992; Kezar, 2001; Kramer, 2000) resulting in a normative consensus about the intended change (Kezar, 2007).

Institutional change. This term will refer to deep and pervasive change that has permeated an entire organization (Eckel & Kezar, 2003).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations. There are limitations and delimitations within this study, which are worth noting. One limitation was connected to time and financial resources—having a single interview session visit with each CDO for a short period of time. Initially, the hope was to conduct in-person interviews, but technology was utilized to complete most of the interviews. This interview technology was through online video conference software. Fortunately, using phenomenological methods is well suited to researching a smaller sampling of participants.

A second limitation was situating the researcher (me) as the primary study instrument. I must not influence the data or predetermine the themes to negatively impact the universal approach of this study (Patton, 2014). Qualitative studies often work best with educators and randomized samples. The quality of the research will afford rich and deep connections, but a person may never quite understand the experience of another individual or an organization (Patton, 2014).

Delimitations. One delimitation in this study was limiting the study to current CDOs in higher education. Other perspectives from past CDOs in higher education could have been studied. This would lend a broader view of experiences from former CDOs. Limiting this research to a specific population will highlight an area of higher education that has been overlooked in previous research related to CDOs yet opening this study to not only a higher number of CDOs from the higher education realm but also from former CDOs would create a larger sample size.

A second delimitation, as stated within the "research population" section, will comprise focusing exclusively on CDOs and not involving interviews with other campus members who may provide insight into their CDOs' campus roles and efforts. Connecting with critical campus members might provide a layer of useful data, which would strengthen the findings. Within higher education, identity and mission runs strong at many institutions, but the changing landscape of diversity impacts how these institutions lead diversity efforts (Chang et al., 2014).

Chapter 1 Summary

In the higher education landscape, stakeholders at colleges and universities can either limit efforts in diversity or create and implement support efforts for diversity (Paredes-Collins, 2009). The CDO role presents opportunities to facilitate new "cultural norms" on campuses, but the challenge is vision-casting plus supporting the CDO role within organizational structures. CDOs must navigate unpredictable institutional system challenges, hostility, and uneven support, with issues ranging from hiring practices to academic curricula (Coopwood & Lewis Jr., 2017). There is a sense of urgency in ensuring professionalism and support within each administrative area of colleges and universities, especially for CDOs. These senior-level leaders in campus diversity usually have no recognized authority to command, reward, or punish campus professionals outside their immediate leadership, structuring the CDO role primarily as a symbol (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). Insights from CDOs about their experiences are important to campuses today and

highlighting these perspectives are critical to learning more about how CDOs are leading institutions. The primary interest in this study is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of CDOs and the ambiguity they experience in their organizational structures. A presentation of the literature surrounding this phenomenon is shown in Chapter 2. An outline of the methodology and plan for data collection is displayed in Chapter 3. The process of data gathering, analysis, and synthesis is presented in Chapter 4. Recommendations and suggestions for future research is offered in Chapter 5. The results of this study will afford a greater sense of meaning regarding CDOs' experiences and an understanding of the ambiguity in CDOs' organizational structure. In addition, this study will inform stakeholders at colleges and universities about improved structure and support for CDOs in higher education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Higher educational institutions can deliver opportune moments for development, enrichment, and societal movement to benefit the world (Bowen & Bok, 1998). These features with the connections to change and diversity will create transformation for the 21st century (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). Success in higher education as it pertains to efforts to increase diversity and inclusion, occurs when campus leadership displays a commitment to organizational change by appointing a CDO (Wilson, 2013).

Introduction to the Literature Review

Realities of the CDO role have become an important topic in higher education within the last decade. Various research studies give insight into the impressive rise in the existence of the role and the different types of structures that exist regarding organization in the work. Since the 1950's, educational institutions gradually attend to methods of diversifying and desegregating through affirmative action initiatives and programs (Kronman, 2000). During this time, affirmative action officers were created to carry out this mission. In the 1970s, some institutions reimaged the role and renamed it "vice president for minority affairs," the change was met with critics as a symbolic appeasement to protesting and campus climate (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). As time went on with the affirmative action and diversity officer roles, a split was created in to meet two needs. Equal opportunity officers (affirmative action officers) focused more on fairness in hiring and working practices, this position was in the human resources area for higher education (Kronman, 2000). CDOs (formerly minority officers) was reframed to focus more than human resource issues, but issues throughout campuses impacting students, staff, faculty, policies, curriculum, and campus climate (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

According to Leon (2014), increasing the number of higher education CDOs indicating a renewed pledge to diversity, shifting from a reaction model to a proactive model that is mindful of

managing resources for diversity efforts. A reaction model is when a life changing event happens, this case around diversity and a response is created to address the issue. A proactive model means implementing a program and policy change before a life changing issue occurs around diversity (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). CDOs are constantly met with challenges regarding campus mission and identity. It is important to have a CDO to lead dialogue and implement inclusivity. Nussbaum and Chang (2013) concluded that having a senior-level diversity officer to address responses to differences can lead clarity in cases of unjustified advantage or disadvantage and the reinforcement of inequities. The person leading this change in campus diversity is the CDO. In higher education, CDOs are limited in number within the higher education system, which is closely tied to an organizational design of the position (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013).

The study topic. Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) found that CDOs are insightful leaders for higher education. This research presented a detailed examination of various facets concerning the higher education CDO role. Arnold and Kowalski-Braun (2012) emphasized the status of structural intention in defining how to capitalize CDOs' abilities and the importance of reporting structure connected to administrative leadership. The options of how a higher education CDO position can be configured ranged from single-person units to divisional arrangements with numerous direct reporting units and substantial budgets (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Diversity efforts are unique in a traditional organizational structure; it has been met with resistance and opposition due to the transactional state of higher education (Tierney, 1997).

The context. Throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s when higher education became more accessible to African-Americans and women, minority affairs offices were established to help students make the transition into male dominated White institutions (Williams, 2013). During the late 1960s, federal laws and policies created a need for compliance and accountability for institutions receiving federal aid (Parker, 2015). Early affirmative action officers were assigned

implement affirmative action programs such as enhancing compositional diversity of the university's student body and faculty (Banjeri, 2005). The goals associated with these efforts were to remediate and eliminate discrimination among federally protected identities (Williams & Clowney, 2007). Over periods of time the role of affirmative action officers created a split in the role and created new defined roles. One role being an equal opportunity officers (affirmative action officers) focused more on fairness in hiring and working practices, this position was in the human resources area for higher education (Kronman, 2000). The second role, CDOs (formerly minority officers) was reframed to focus more than human resource issues, but issues throughout campuses impacting students, staff, faculty, policies, curriculum, and campus climate (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

Many of these early positions and units were relegated to the margins of the institution and were tasked with working on low compositional diversity (Barcelo, 2007). The challenge during the early phases before the transformation of CDO was to only appease a minority groups with a symbol of hope and nothing else to create sustainable campus diversity change. During, the initial phase of the structure created stress to provide growth and chances for significant collaboration. In certain situations, these stresses ignited student resistance and activism. These actions also created the need to expand support in resources: human and financial for campus culture changes (Nixon, 2017). Throughout various colleges and universities, diversity advances have fallen short in connecting the pieces. What was missing is committed cross-campus bond in energies with diversity, which subsequently created ambiguity in diversity appointments (Milem, Chang, & Lising-Antonio, 2005).

The significance. The role of the CDO is to connect sustainable diversity initiatives within institutions of higher education. "In this context, sustainability, broadly defined, requires communities to increase their understanding that certain practices may have disparate impact on

individuals from different groups" (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012, p. 30). The institutional setting of colleges and universities influences many experiences from staff, faculty, and students, especially regarding diversity of the campus structure.

In formalizing commitment to diversity, a CDO confronts the challenge to request that campus community members have the same commitment to diversity. A CDO's influence and authority is important in guiding diversity efforts to creates, access, cultivate, and nurture initiatives, programs, and policy change (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Institutional power dynamics is associated with the structure and design of the organization. Arnold and Kowalski-Braun (2012) claim that institutional influence on the campus community will help CDOs with creating institutional change for diversity.

The problem statement. The problem studied in this dissertation is the ambiguity in the organizational structure for the position of higher education CDOs. Without a clear message of institutional support and vision for diversity and inclusion, CDOs can be in a precarious position with regard to finding and creating ways to support changes in policies and practices that are embedded within exclusionary, broad, or ambiguous discourse (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). An active CDO administrator has a perceived mission to increase institutional diversity efforts, either by increasing access, building international relationships, and/or improving curriculum, just to name a few ways (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008).

The problem statement stems from higher education institutions not knowing how to set up an organizational design process for the role, which creates an ambiguity in creating responsibilities for the role (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Goals around diversity and inclusion at times are vague and broad in strategic institutional planning; this negatively impacts the CDO through a measure of complexity that reflects the ambiguity in the decision-making process for the campus community (Harvey, 2014). CDOs will only succeed if the structure of the

role is clearly defined and if the CDO can convince key institutional members to engage in the change process (Harvey, 2014).

The organization. The review of literature includes the following: (a) conceptual framework of diversity, institutional change, institutional power, and collaboration; (b) relevant research on diversity in higher education; (c) literature on CDO development framework; (d) literature relevant to the CDO position as defined in higher education; (e) literature on perceived challenges for a CDO in higher education; (f) description of the methodologies/designs used for CDOs in higher education research; (g) synthesis of information on CDOs in higher education; and (h) critique on research on CDOs in higher education.

Conceptual Framework

Creating diversity initiatives is no longer significant only for moral purposes; a global action for excellence and inclusive in diversity is a greater connection to new fundamentals in current lives; and to get the most out of the newness of change, mindfulness in administrative work of a CDO has more meaning than ever (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). The growing number of appointments of CDOs in higher education implies a realization that diversity will continue to have a vital role at institutions of higher education, despite continual debates regarding the value of diversity at colleges and universities (Barcelo, 2007). To first understand the CDO position, one must understand the model of development of the CDO position. Williams and Wade-Golden's (2007) foundational work argues that CDOs are senior leaders with a straight-line to the top institutional executive or at least to the Chief Academic Officer (CAO)/provost and have an influential hand in implementing campus change around diversity initiatives. More than in most executive level leadership roles, arguments of CDO domain are a function of his or her ability to frame issues, build relationships, facilitate collaboration, and inspire allies and stakeholders to create change (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

According to Williams and Wade-Golden (2007), CDOs also count on their personality, charm, ability, and critical thinking to create cross-connecting associations to execute task on their campuses. CDOs have many incredible attributes, but beyond having gifts to do diversity work, the role continues to face multiple issues in higher education. CDOs note that poorly constructed positions will hinder the accomplishment of their tasks as well as success, without a bond to ascend structure of the role; (Leon, 2014). Diversity, social justice, and inclusiveness must be centered in the organizational culture. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) identified a CDO strategy that aids as a model for stakeholders at colleges and universities to strategize the CDO position and build an impactful participating force for challenges in structural diversity.

Diversity. The term diversity among stakeholders at colleges and universities has carried different meanings to campus life. That said, the term diversity, early in higher education, had minimum consistency in written work among organizations and institutions, and even the notion of fundamentally defining diversity (Parker, 2015). Currently, the idea of diversity has extended to include various identities such as sex, faith practice, geographic location, socioeconomic class, and race and ethnic identity. (Williams & Clowney, 2007). Parker (2015) found that blurred lines are around diversity among stakeholders at colleges and universities; during the collective past, challenges in equity in accessibility and diversity are linked to underrepresented groups and vital operational pieces to institutions.

Meaning making among institutions varies regarding diversity at times. Institutions often make connections with operational diversity for many campus members (Parker, 2015). Williams and Clowney (2007) added that defining diversity is linked to how campuses view inclusion and multiculturalism. Difference in background symbolizes creating a caring community and leads to enriching outcomes for students, which in turn gives the institutional diversity a lift in promoting a better climate (Milem et al., 2005). Institutional administration has the ability to provide a clear

structure and more resources to bring about change around diversity strategies through collaboration (Williams & Clowney, 2007).

In centralizing diversity in discussions of educational excellence, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) made an argument that diversity initiatives are necessary for the educational enterprise (Williams, 2013). This argument emphasizes the need for diversity in education functions to minimize dissenting political, cultural, and social perspectives that view diversity efforts, inclusive language, and outreach programs as things that stakeholders at colleges do for the sake of "political correctness" (Ruiz-Mesa, 2016). Milem et al. (2005) argue that assisting diversity and difference will enrich the student achievement and will bring about campus-wide transformation across institutions. An emphasis on diversity efforts should be natural when creating an inclusive environment.

Institutional change. Higher education institutions create opportune moments to take on the task of building capacity in a developing global educational market (Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009). An institutional review can include an examination of campus structure and organizational development, which can initiate a process of change. Administrators need to have an overall commitment to change in culture. Having an understanding and ability to make sound decisions, building collaborative environment will enact leadership to direct modification more successfully (Tierney, 1997). Williams (2013) argues there is a need to create awareness in organizational change with valuing the need to create sustainable strategies around diversity; and the need to build tools will always stay at a level compared to practicing, but never playing the game. Williams (2013) further suggests that a poor diversity initiative is the same as not having a strategy in the first place.

"In simplest terms, institutional change is the supplanting of the old model of production with a new one" (Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009, p. 478). Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, and

Vallejo (2004) found that the stakeholders at colleges and universities have possibilities to create impactful learning environments with orchestrating change in a way that is a transformational experience and not just a transactional one for community members. Arnold and Kowalski-Braun (2012) found that challenges around diversity, equity, and inclusion will change when accessibility is just and fair to all and not certain groups connected to higher education. From a standpoint of hope in a system may go unnoticed if the change around structure is needed (Tierney 1993).

> Whether it is race and ethnicity or other areas of diversity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, disability, or religion), higher education is challenged not only with creating space for diverse faculty members, staff, and students; it is also responsible for helping them thrive. (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012, p. 29)

Bolman and Deal (2003) believe that there are four concepts for institutional modification, and they relate to human resource, the symbolic, politics, and structure. Each frame identifies challenges among areas, but also gives light to improvements. Bolman and Deal (2003) continued in their study to outline the content of each frame: the human resource frame connects to investing into people and can give insights into building diversity; the symbolic frame gives foundation in change abilities; the political frame gives connection to vital resources; and the structural frame places policy into an action process. Williams (2013) found that by making connections to institutional priorities in relation to diversity, administrators will influence and build a foundation that lasts in the symbolic frame that will capitalize on operational and institutional change in and for diversity.

Institutional power. Institutionalizing diversity at colleges and universities, requires making changes to structures, policies, and the environment (Kezar, 2007). Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) found that a CDO model sends a message to provide commitment to campus diversity as a strategic goal and it mirrors the comparable organizational structures of other titled

senior leadership roles. Higher educational institutions often have unclear and contested goal structures, which can be justified and challenged at the same time (Baldrige, 1980). For institutional goals concerning diversity, CDOs' serve as a senior-level administrator to deliver focus care to diversity initiatives and issues, through influencing networks of the institution (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). Power is linked to the centrality of the CDO role in the organization and the content of the portfolio for the role.

According to Worthington et al. (2014), expanding institutional power representation with adding a CDO to the campus administration is vital in transforming other elements to the greater campus and curriculum. When an institution is honestly making the commitment to support diversity on campus, diversity-related initiatives, appropriate leadership, policy, and curriculum transformation must follow (Paredes-Collins, 2009). It is important for CDOs to not have the illusion of power and have the appropriate organizational structure to lead change (Cohen & March, 1974). Recognizing the role of CDOs as a position of institutional power, gives action toward the reduction of patterns of privilege that have been part of the colleges and universities from its inception (Harvey, 2014). The new narrative of CDOs being a part of the institutional power dynamic that infuses diversity into highly politicized deliberations about resources such as budget allocations and priorities of the institution (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008).

Collaboration. Through a paradigm shift in strategy, command and control assumptions of hierarchical organizations have been displaced by leadership styles that emphasize the necessity of communication and collaboration (Bastedo, 2012). Collaboration is vital to higher education CDOs in reaching and building new ways to sustain change among the campus community and the external stakeholders (Wilson, 2013). The potential for collaboration is important to long-term relationships and connecting organizational values and ethical principles (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Previous understanding and skills in workforce literature can aid actions in higher education.

Kezar and Lester (2009) developed a framework to measure and recognize partnership within various institutions: each frame presents an opportunity moment for institutional growth and accountability through engagement in enhancing collaboration.

A foundation to connect resources links a commitment from Kezar and Lester's (2009) first stage with bringing administrators closer to coalition build within the system. They move from constructing foundational commitment to stage two with action steps toward collaboration. This second stage is vital in pushing administration to mean what they say and take the necessary steps toward change. Kezar and Lester (2009) further discuss making meaning through established steps in the importance of networking through practice and representation. The last stage is a mark of stability in the created collective structure of redefining organizational structure and scope. The stages have the amount of influence to back, set, and bring creditability to an outlook of partnership. A key finding in the CDO position among institutions means the organizational structure must change, so that a CDO has the backing to create and implement diversity initiatives with a team and not alone (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008).

Review of Research and Methodological Literature

Higher education stakeholders grapple with leadership in many areas on their campuses about providing the best learning experiences to all stakeholders. Applying impactful approaches to inclusion, and more importantly diversity, the added value of investing into pluralistic campus community enhances growth and development (Paredes-Collins, 2009). But who will lead the efforts around diversity at the senior level at these colleges and universities? There have been tensions between the identity of higher education institution and diversity efforts. These tensions require a commitment from the institutions, and the CDO can be the driving force for the transformation to institutional diversity leadership (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013). All members of

the organization and external constituents must be involved in the transformation process for sustainability.

Diversity in higher education. While limited in scope, the research in diversity in higher education is steadily growing (Harulu, 2005). Kratt's (2004) research on diversity in higher education, has raised great awareness toward the need for studying diversity in higher education. Confer and Mamiseishvili (2012) suggests that difference in student background has been a challenge throughout the past and also in the present; despite universities being places that create change.

According to Abadeer (2009), the reason that diversity should be a valued asset to institutions is the richness of uniting various backgrounds and changing the system of power and community. Perez (2013) found a link between diversity and early educational traditions; his findings were on trends that left out diverse experiences for many campus communities and structures. Dahlvig (2013) examines that higher education offers a unique backdrop as it blends institutional characteristics and structures with deeply held personal beliefs. The interaction of personal values with the institutional commitment to new perspectives and novel traditions creates a new complex environment for diversity leadership development. Diversity is vital to the new era of higher education; the mission is to enrich lives throughout institutional areas (students, staff, and faculty; Williams, 2014). There is a change of ideas regarding what people perceive the world should be and those now with new perspectives (Harvey, 2014).

"The way issues of diversity are addressed by institutions is affected to varying degrees by the patterns developed throughout each institution's history, its understanding of diversity, and the traditions from which those colleges were founded" (Perez, 2013, p. 22). Harulu (2005) found that one tool institutions may use to build upon diversity is the concept of reconciliation, and to be reconciled, means to change, reestablish, and restore relationships and to make things right. Harulu

(2005) found strategies in racial reconciliation, which suggests that people emphasize love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, and unity. Institutions have been challenged in addressing issues of diversity, inequity, and injustice. Many people see reconciliation as an important step in beginning to acknowledge the importance of diversity globally (Perez, 2013).

Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) note that institutions have success with promoting diversity in higher education when they commit to transforming culture in the planning process. Access to colleges and universities have vital forces and resources for advancing social capital and can impact nationally aspects that link different societal norms to students—both in their financial and individual growth (Paredes-Collins, 2009). Perez (2013) describes recent commitments of institutions to attract more students from diverse backgrounds, stating that "both predominantly White and the predominantly Black colleges have continued to work to make their programs available to all ethnic groups" (p. 24).

According to Perez, the emphasis on diversity seems to focus on issues of access and success, which make up one of Smith's (2015) dimensions of diversity. In order to assess factors that support or inhibit diversity in higher education, Smith's dimensions of diversity suggest four dimensions of diversity that are critical to institutions, including campus commitment in the change process, building relationships, accessibility to academic means, and inclusivity in the college environment. Harulu (2005) acknowledges that diversity addresses the cultural context of the counseling relationship and the level of understanding of persons of different cultural backgrounds and skills which includes the ability to work with culturally diverse clients with the proper use of techniques and strategies.

"Research also indicates that opportunities at colleges and universities play a vital role in the moral development of their students, specifically by facilitating their quest for meaning (Davignon & Thomson Jr., 2015, p. 532). Confer and Mamiseishvili (2012) suggest that advancing

movement in diversity throughout colleges and universities should explore challenges in leadership, staff, faculty, and students. Davignon (2016) found that doing that type of work will create opportunities for a higher chance in meeting any student outcomes expected by institutions. This will make an impact on areas in diversity, especially accommodating campus climate.

Stakeholders at colleges and universities made moves in being intentional within a context of morality and academic imperatives which allows institutional mission challenges to have an opportunity for resolution and creates space for academic directives (Hulme, Groom, & Heltzel, 2016). According to Henck (2011), powers at play in higher education are the ability to address morality and beliefs; which at the same time gives opportunity to civic duty to each community the specific institution serves. Stakeholders at colleges and universities have encouraged partnering institutions to advance in aspects of community within diversity, although much with the emphasis has been placed on creating a critical mass within leadership, faculty, staff, and student bodies of institutions (Perez, 2013).

Paredes-Collins (2009) found that stakeholders at colleges and universities should be accountable for creating awareness for diversity and have the need to empower inclusive comprehension; there are challenges to argue vital influence of difference that institutions have with community and the measurement of student growth. The initial purpose around colleges and universities in the U.S. was the idea of societal progression and end inequalities and issues of difference or diversity in current times (Hurtado, 1992). According to Harulu (2005), research recognizes that some institutions are undertaking diversity initiatives independently. Diversity in leadership roles is an idea that commands a level of care and concern in creating spaces to challenge and aid with empowerment steps for change (Hulme et al., 2016). Hulme et al. further conceptualizes empowerment as solid action steps, risk taking abilities, and inquiring capabilities in the challenge process; this motivation has the intent to create impactful purpose.

Paredes-Collins (2009) suggests that diversity in higher education should carry on making intentional changes to campus climate through initiatives to empower growth at institutions. From administrative leadership to a commitment for all elements of a college or a university, suitable resources are needed to sustain change and not just modes of speaking about diversity work for CDOs.

CDO development framework. Researchers suggest that the CDO Development Framework (CDODF) is built on the foundational concepts of organizational design and that structure should follow from the big-picture diversity goals of the institution and its strategic diversity plan (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Approaches to collaboration, function, and area collection provide structural components that are linked to CDODF (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Arnold and Kowalski-Braun (2011) state the area collection or portfolio divisional model has the importance in implementing created and stated outcomes for diversity. What is needed for the CDO is a person at a high administrative role with a direct line to the president or CAO.

Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) believe that the organizational level for the area collection will make available positioning for CDOs to focus on planning for institutions and give administrative oversight just like other administrative leadership among colleges and universities. Function or unit stage in this framework is a structural model that produces active collaboration between areas in institutions, but with a focus in hierarchy scaffolding with the CDO directing many in the area (Parker, 2015). This type of structure is connected to what could be perceived as the norm for the office of the CDO and their reporting areas within institutions (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Parker (2015) further explores function or unit-based model as a top-down organizational structure for CDOs who oversee a team that is minimal in size to advance diversity efforts. This limit in capacity building and the inconsistency is evident in each institution with deeper unit coverage for CDOs.

Parker (2015) argues that the complexity with diversity work lies within systemic factors for CDOs at institutions. Paramount questions for discussion refer to where leaderships in diversity efforts should come from at these institutions (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). The idea of power and authority at times are not given to CDO, especially in being the decision-maker in institutional matters (Williams & Wade Golden, 2007). Researchers' note that a framework categorized through a CDO running as a lone staffed office single-person focuses on campaigning to other areas is more of a collaboration approach or collaborative officer approach. According to this method, CDOs create an opportunity to coalition building to advance diversity efforts by brainstorming and planning in the initial year at the institution (Leon, 2014). Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) argue that this model has human resource limitations that impact implementing projects and initiatives. Achievement of plans must happen through collaborative relationships and lateral coordination. Figure 1 details elements of the CDODF (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013):

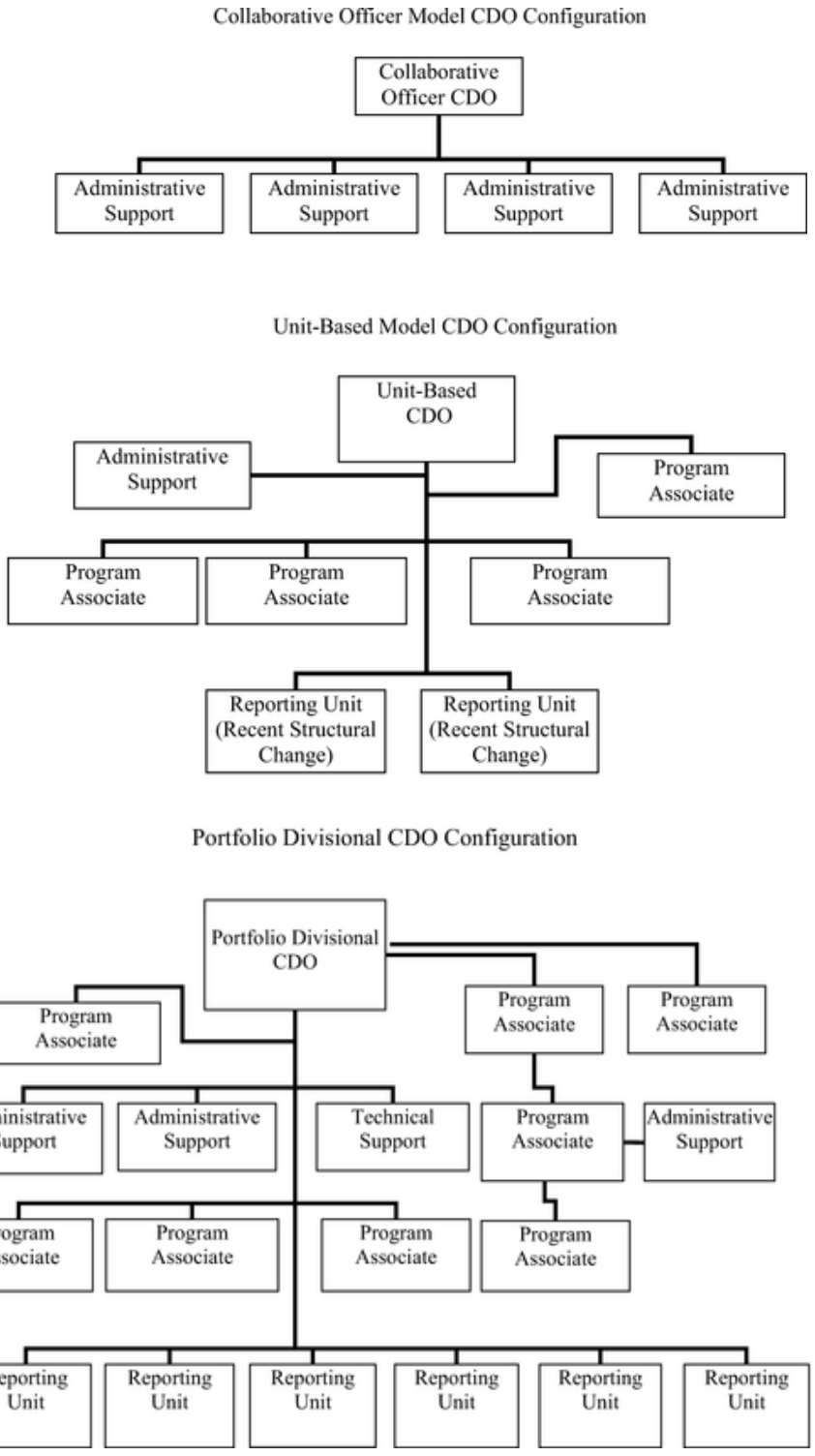

Figure 1. CDO development framework (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

CDO position defined in higher education. In leading efforts around diversity at colleges and universities, presidents can create senior level roles to advance institutions in their diversity,

equity, and inclusion practices. In many cases, once this role is created through institutional channels, titles are made to bring credibility to the role such as vice-president or dean as a formal placeholder for an executive as the person directing diversity initiatives (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Institutions are making a serious commitment to diversifying campuses by creating CDO positions (Wilson, 2013). The CDO's positionality must naturally intermix with the campus environment, in which stakeholders at colleges and universities begin to follow suit in activity or practice in keeping up with the diverse nature of change by either impacting educational attainability, financial access, or opening campuses more globally (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). Higher education institutions have focused their attention on inclusion on their campuses and growth in student experience, but typically no real change in diversity occurs over time (Perez, 2013).

The overall educational mission among higher education campus communities in linking diversity initiatives has been commanded by a small number of individuals. The burden in many cases has fallen heavily on the CDO role who is expected to blaze the trail for institutional change (Wilson, 2013). Higher education CDOs are the professionals in "diversity trenches" who often find themselves preventing or solving crises, carrying heavy workloads, and wearing many hats in their attempt to live up to the demands of their job to support students of color, educate White students and staff, and hold their institutions accountable (Longman, 2017). Most of the CDOs at colleges and universities carry a "double burden" of being the only professional of color on campus and serving as a role model for students and spokesperson for their racial or ethnic group (Longman, 2017). The bookend view with diversity within colleges and universities takes on a blessed opportunity and a challenging or bitter view in meeting the needs and creating the proper space for change, making a clear paradigm shift for colleges and universities to comprehend and produce new ways to function as a unit (Abadeer, 2009).

The bitter side has been found to be derived from the inability of campus communities to connect with ideas, initiatives, and practices created from the CDOs and their office. When the administration wants to create a senior-level position around diversity, it may create tension within the institutional community, even if the intent from the president's office is to build a new way in operating as an inclusion enterprise for its stakeholders (Abadeer, 2009; Wilson, 2013). These professionals speak of the need for personal and professional sustainability given the weight of responsibility demanded by their roles; many of these CDOs also feel under-resourced and frequently speak of the need for additional staff, budget, programming, and space to do their jobs well and with excellence (Longman, 2017). Largely, CDOs are vital in implementing sustainable measures in diversity matters stretching throughout campus area operations (Williams, 2013).

Wilson (2013) found that the rise of the CDO role is increasing among stakeholders at colleges and universities with the aim to bring awareness and direction around diversity efforts; but there has been ambiguity regarding organizational structure and authority pertaining to CDOs leading diversity initiatives. Williams (2006) suggests that the opportunity to have a role of a CDO will lead to equity and inclusion efforts with a strong foundation for diversity at colleges and universities. In some cases, however, it is only created to be a symbol and rarely not showcases change through sustaining diversity practices. Over the last decade, CDO roles have been created within limited amounts of colleges and universities; and a discovery in job sites have determined that the CDO position is becoming something of a phenomenon in scope from a demand and need for the role throughout difference in institutional landscapes (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Perez (2013) found that employing a CDO is an approach that could provide the accountability necessary for an institution to make progress in higher education.

Wilson (2013) found that growth in senior-level leadership at colleges and universities comes with some complexity around roles. Studies have shown the most complex position is the

one focusing on diversity work, even reaching to the outside organizations. Higher education institutions through time have added early versions of other senior-level positions with focuses on student affairs and communications. In defining a CDO, Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) characterizes the individual in the position as "a senior administrator who guides, coordinates, leads, enhances, and at times supervises the formal diversity capabilities of the institution in an effort to build sustainable capacity to achieve an environment that is inclusive and excellent for all" (p. 8). Wilson (2013) note that the role of the CDO can champion diversity in a way to build momentum with responsibility within a high-ranking position and office functionality, in leading planning and implementation advancements. It can impact many different areas on-campus from academic affairs to human resources in bringing integrity and equity to institutions.

Studies have found CDOs have an ability to create a multicultural and inclusive campus community. They enhance the institution's potential to build a diverse learning and work environment that accomplishes strategic goals, such as preparing all students for a diverse and global environment and pursuing areas of scholarship and inquiry that help understand issues of diversity across disciplines (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Studies note many different resources should be provided to a CDO to assist in getting the most from the position and office function; doing so will empower change in the diversity planning process and implementation of the work around campuses (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Sustaining the change process aids diversity leadership within a high-ranking tied to the president's office and continues the creditability needed for a CDO. Other studies noted a correlation with CDOs and a direct line to authority to help produce an ability to influence a shift in culture among structural change at colleges and universities (Williams, 2013).

Gose (2006) argue that CDO positions are rising at new levels because of issues around college campuses that have caused uproars within underrepresented populations at institutions;

from faculty, staff, and especially student voices for change. According to Williams (2013), creating a formal leadership for diversity work shows a commitment from college and university administration on building more creditability around the role; this has created a greater importance and reason for the growth at many institutions. Stanley (2014) suggests opportunities have enabled CDOs to deepen knowledge, scope, and expectations of the work that is performed across a variety of institutions; with three consistent themes emanate from experience: the work is complex, the need for more research in the field, and the need standards of professional practice.

Administrators at institutions need a strong voice promoting diversity at the president's cabinet level to bring a new look on how a change will impact different areas of the college and university landscape (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Leon (2014) has discovered the importance in connections between CDOs and other high-ranking leadership. Making strategic moves in decision-making produces clear objectives for institutions in representation, access, and growth for stakeholders at colleges and universities. Organizational structuring highlights the role and cope of CDOs from the standpoint of equity from administrator to administrator; with having direct reports to build upon capacity to carry out the work of diversity (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). There are many positives in having a diversity office staff for CDOs, which create opportunities to implement initiatives, showcase programming, create collaboration moments, and produce better communication regarding diversity in each institution (Leon, 2014).

Nixon (2017) suggests that a CDO's role at institutions is vital in how campuses operate, and it is critical to create awareness around the CDO role guiding diversity education. The currency of the CDO model in institutions of higher education must be informed by deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the people tapped to "galvanize new possibilities on campus" (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013, p. 37). Research has shown the need to understand the history and agency of people in the CDO role (Gravley-Stack, Ray, & Peterson, 2016). Studies

have indicated a connection to a college and university president's support to CDOs being a credibility booster to set the footing in carrying out diversity initiatives on campuses (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012). Gravley-Stack et al. (2016) examined the institutional undercurrents around the work of CDOs and how their role has impacted education; the researchers believe many institutional diverse characteristics make the most of the CDO effectiveness. Perez (2013) findings have indicated the faith connection of work in diversity is aligned with biblical texts and the CDO position.

Challenges for CDOs in higher education. Henck states that "higher education is facing a period of substantial change from the most recent decade into the near future. . . . To address these challenges successfully means maintaining fidelity to both organizational cultures; the key issue is providing exemplary academic and administrative oversight while maintaining institutional missional values" (2011, p. 198). Williams and Wade-Golden (2008) have found that the CDO role takes a lot of discriminatory language from the lack of understanding the role's breadth and depth in the interworking's for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Stakeholders at colleges and universities cannot employ a CDO and believe that it will advance the college or university's environment. The "diversity savior" –that is, the CDO—cannot make modifications swiftly alone (Williams, 2007).

Perez (2013) has found that being content with tension from formative areas of diversity is imperative and there can be tension between the mission of colleges and the colleges trying to diversify. Perez further explains that diversity at colleges and universities only connects specific elements; for some or most, diversity may excluded faith practice and sexual identity; therefore institutions need to acknowledge this pressure, with a clear sense of communication of what types of diversity if it is truly all encompassing or create a space to have a understanding dialogue on reasons why exclusion is needed or not.

According to the findings by Paredes-Collins (2009), many schools within the higher education community place diversity as a low priority in thinking of where to utilize time, energy, talent in growing and creating learning opportunities. Abadeer (2009) believes stakeholders at colleges and universities need to be reflective in evaluating strengths and weaknesses from a collective past to generate and capitalize on becoming a more diversity educational pathway for students. "Creating and applying innovative solutions to persistent problems plaguing higher education may seem daunting to even the most courageous leaders. . . . However, viable solutions and creative new paradigms are already emerging that could seamlessly align with the mission, values, and vision of higher education" (Hulme, 2016, p. 100).

Wilson (2013) suggests people in the CDO role need to be viewed like any other college or university administrator—with the same respect, staffing, and financial resources to carry out plans and procedures to direct diversity efforts. CDO supporters strongly feel that designation for this role must be senior-status with a direct link to the institution's top-executive (president). Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) perceive that the CDO positioning among the president's cabinet is a source to receive proper backing around diversity initiatives. Williams (2013) has found that a CDO status among administrative colleagues were on the low-end of priority and power, the chances to implement change would be more challenging in championing institutional outcomes of diversity. Community members not supporting changes in policies are within the challenges facing higher education CDOs; thus, limiting what the task of a higher education CDO is positioned to produce for the institution. A criticism for having a higher education CDO may create a difficult environment or campus climate for someone trying to implement a shift in culture and tear down existing silos among departments, which might include challenges to institution's identity (Wilson, 2013).

Gose (2006) has found criticisms regarding the choice of higher education CDO in terms of equity in identities and leadership in assessing the perceived learning rewards of diversity. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) have explored the linkage between the CDOs as agents of change at colleges and universities with having resources to function at a high-level (ex. staffing and financial means). Leon (2014) illustrates that CDOs with reduced roles have limited functions, which creates certain constraints; for example, CDOs must "listen to the views and ideas of individuals on campus with decision making power' without the authority to respond, implement, or execute strategies" (Leon, 2014, p. 7).

Stanley (2014) suggests identity is a challenging aspect of a CDO in higher education with overextended values, beliefs, experiences, privileges, and biases, and continuing to interact with people and view academia, higher education, society, and the world. Leon (2014) notes that beyond identity, poorly constructed positions will impede progress for a higher education CDO role and scope, this links to exclusion of resourcing, reporting up to the president or even having the infrastructure to support the work, and no clear communication with constituents to collaborate or educate. The importance of sustainability for a CDO means that institutions must deliver on their promises for diversity and practice being mindful in selecting a qualified leader that seeks to advance the work in diversity (Nixon, 2017).

A challenge to an institution in having a CDO serving at high capacity could cause burnout from leaning too much on a single person around diversity work (Wilson, 2013). Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) believe that the role of a CDO is not singular approached position in resourcing diversity work. Wilson (2013) has found that pressures pile up with having the CDO be the only person to focus on diversity efforts; the need is evident to engage in dialogue at the administrative level to sustain the role and collaborate within many areas to support the CDO on tasks required in shifting culture and climate. Williams and Wade-Golden state that "[CDOs] are

not hired to maintain the status quo but to improve the campus climate, diversify the campus community, and enhance the diversity capabilities of the institution through their leadership, projects, initiatives, relationships, and presence" (2007, p. 11).

The task of diversity institutional efforts must reach further than a CDO or their office with limited resources; it must be a communal intention from all areas on campus (Wilson, 2013). Paredes-Collins (2009) found that cultivating an atmosphere for better communities, they must have a unified front in meeting the opportunity makes waves in campus diversity enhancements. Abadeer (2009) suggests that institutions do the following to meet challenges:

> promote the effective presence, participation, and contribution of diverse cultural minorities; in which creating an inclusive environment is needed in being mindful of all campus community members and building a culture of fear will only hurt progress in diversity efforts at institutions. (p. 194)

Diversity institutional efforts from CDOs impacts many different campus factors such as, shifting demographics, political and legal dynamics, campus community inequities, and academic needs (Williams et al., 2005). It also reflects on the challenges of expanding access and maintaining quality in higher education. Williams et al. suggest doing this by creating an organizational culture for diversity, which they argue are rooted in the mission, vision, values, traditions, and norms of the institution.

Review of Methodological Issues

Studying CDOs in higher education has not been commonplace in higher education. Research regarding diversity in higher education has focused on topics of access and success, campus climate, and education and mission identity (Perez, 2013). It is important to understand CDOs and within this study—higher education CDOs. "Higher education institutions have a unique contribution to make in promoting diversity and social justice in American higher

education, as part of their distinctive institutional missions" (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013, p. 6). This section sheds light on issues related to the use of methods in past studies with the hope to inform approaches in current research being studied on higher education CDOs.

Qualitative. Creswell, Hanson, Clark, and Morales (2007) found that qualitative methods in literature research practices empowered collections for research. Examples include Strauss and Corbin's research (1990) in grounded theory, Stake's (1995) case study, and Moustakas (1994) work on phenomenology—an exploration of different ways knowledge will impact higher education practices. Merriam (2009) believe that qualitative approach to experiences can give someone more insights and interpretations. Commonly used methods for qualitative studies are interviews, focus groups, observations, videos, and notes (Marshall, 2018).

Phenomenology is the reflective study of the spirit of mindfulness as practiced from a grounded view in first-person (Smith, 2007). The purpose of the phenomenological method is to extract people's first-person point of view, so the experience of phenomena is understood at its starting point, while extracting from it the descriptions of each participant's critical experiences and the essence of what we experience (Patton, 2014). The utilization of phenomenological method allows the use of semistructured, open-ended interviews, which provide a casual, collaborating process intended at invoking an inclusive version of the person's experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Wilson (2013) conducted qualitative research of seven CDOs from different institutions. The selection of CDOs was made based on the mission and commitment of institutions about diversity. People are selected in research with intention have the hope to comprehend the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Since diversity is a sensitive topic and only minor studies have been conducted on CDOs, Wilson (2003) believed, that there is a need to examine the rise of the recent phenomenon of the CDO role at colleges and universities. Parker (2015) also conducted a

qualitative study, but on the formation of the chief diversity office with connection to CDOs and their organizational status related to its value and worth on college campuses. The research utilized a design and highlighted a thoughtful view of CDOs at institutions.

Qualitative research attempts to define, comprehend and deduce an issue, whereas creating a foundation in an informational logical frame (Merriam, 2009). Scholars try to explore people's views and define the meaning that is allocated to the understanding of a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Parker (2015) settled for a case study design to highlight a deeper look into and system with analysis factors—he studied the establishment of senior level diversity positions. He found that operational resources and standing were vital to resolving difficulties in the office of a CDO; he also focused on understanding the CDO's role and office dynamics, which provided insights for higher education professionals, leaders and administrators on how to create and sustain a diversity office and a CDO (Parker, 2015). This research was unique from a standpoint of multisite case study and involved primary and secondary interviews that produced a rich study and result section. Parker's (2015) research used a data analysis approach of narrative description.

Purposeful description analysis is a process that uses mindful organization with evaluation in connecting a selective group (Wilson, 2013). Parker's (2015) study revealed that administrative status is necessary to diversity leadership in creating and promoting initiatives. This approach was different from Nixon's (2017) qualitative study of CDOs where he utilized theories of critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism (CRF).

Nixon's study surveyed strategies that women of color used in their role as CDOs and the importance of identity on their perspectives. The method used in the study was interviews and note examination style. The results of the study highlighted many elements: approaches in work, identity linkage to role, navigation in challenging assumptions, and finding a balance in identity and role (Nixon, 2017). Nixon's findings spotlighted the value to comprehend complications and

challenges of the CDO role once it is created. She (2017) argued that institutions need to support the CDO position suitably, through various means in organizational structure.

Leon (2014) directed qualitative research in exploring CDOs and models of CDODF from Williams and Wade-Golden (2007). Leon drawn upon the CDO structural framework, which recognizes the collaborative approach, unit-based approach, and portfolio divisional approaches for CDO (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). At higher education institutions, these approaches range between modest single-person office operations to more established multilevel reporting structure. Leon (2014) used a multisite case study approach, interviewing CDOs and administrators working at public research colleges and universities. He found that of all CDOs were involved in several tasks to fulfill their role; however, their formation of the role ensured influence on leadership to complete their work. Another multiple case qualitative study featured Davalos (2014) with examining different types of colleges and universities that have CDOs shifting culture on campuses with positive results through diversity initiatives.

Davalos (2014) noted that stakeholders at colleges and universities have the ability to sustain diversity efforts when there is an engaged campus community and leadership from a CDO with minimum barriers for progress. When leaders have an inclusive thoughtfulness of the campus climate, sound resolutions will be created within many populations and CDOs will be supported in their work (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012). Davalos (2014) concluded the study with a promise to bring in factors of change—that is, a new vision on community building and focusing on a new process to approach diversity, in which attainability in a strong organizational structure for CDOs.

Quantitative. In making decisions through quantitative studies, scholars develop the connection between factors and position questions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2003). “The value of qualitative assessment approaches has been underestimated primarily because they are often juxtaposed against long-standing quantitative traditions and the widely accepted premise that the

best research produces generalizable and statistically significant findings" (Harper & Kuh, 2007, p. 5). Creswell (2003) identified within large groups the importance of random sampling in equity in likelihood of selection for quantitative data in generalization (Creswell, 2003). With CDOs making decisions, measuring diversity alters institutional effectiveness to build on foundational or systemic changes to climate (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008).

Directing and communicating institutional research on campus climate is important and must be fundamental part of the process of shifting campus culture (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Scholars explored variances between White students and non-White students in their observations of diversity around campus (Rankin & Reason, 2005). The scholars found that non-White students have challenging experiences in viewing the campus climate compared to White students. Furthermore, research on this subject is one of many ways to assess campus climate at institutions. Worthington (2008) notes that:

> despite a vast array of research designed to address many issues related to campus climate for diversity, very little attention has been given to the scientific validity or quality of that research, especially with respect to measurement and assessment issues that are the most fundamental aspects of scholarly inquiry. (p. 202)

Stakeholders at colleges and universities have gained intentionality in striving to be aware of trends within diversity, equity and inclusion issues; with the hope of proactive and reactive approaches (Gose, 2006).

Mixed Methods. Creswell (2003) found that mixed method approaches create a way to examine data to connect research quantitatively and qualitatively, advancing the research credibility by deepening the understanding of the subject matter. Mixed method approaches place quantitative approaches that offer a wide-ranging description of the research, while qualitative approaches source levelness to the examination from the questions of the study (Paredes-Collins,

2003). Creswell explained that “an emerging field of study is to consider how validity might be different for mixed methods studies than for a quantitative or a qualitative study” (2003, p. 219). Kratt (2003) conducted a study using mixed methods that promoted data triangulation and validity, in which multiple forms of data were utilized to identify themes related to each of the research questions.

Synthesis of Research Findings

An extensive collection of experiences of CDOs yields various concepts for education and examination. In addition, CDO work educational materials are frequently abstractly duplicative, but deficient in reliable results due to variations in the organizational scope in role and work for CDOs. Whatever the setting, the CDO role is viewed as daunting, because of the position (Williams, 2013). Therefore, the preferred approach to researching current literature is to identify patterns and analyze literature themes that span across different conceptual frameworks (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Campus engagement. Students encounter diversity through several means (Parker, 2015). A higher educational environment sets the tone on identity of students throughout the campus climate; scholars classify this as organizational diversity (Parker, 2015; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Hurtado, 1992). This formation symbolizes a mixture of enrollment and illustration of diverse persons on college campuses. Diversity through the eyes of students generate from engaging with peers and other campus interactions (Hurtado, 1992). These moments or engagements for students may come in the form of student activity events or club meetings. Also, from classroom interactions—which is a vital experience in terms of diversity in academics--engaging with intentionality in classroom material should connect with a national and global mindset (Parker, 2015). CDOs at times have an informal designation of being a “change

management specialists" from the standpoint expertise on advancing culture at institutions (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007).

The types of strategies that CDOs use for institutional transformation will no doubt be expansive, depending on institutional mission, resources, history, context, and culture; two strategies, which emerged today connect with engagement: recruitment and diversity scholarship (Leon, 2014; Stanley, 2014; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Leon (2014) and Stevenson (2014) identified that campus communities need to critically think about hiring a CDO to fit their institutional mission for diversity efforts. These researchers found that this is the most important exercise and a "lackluster" approach will not work. Leon (2014) and Stevenson (2014) further state that campuses must first envision assortment in diversity scope that mirrors their community guidelines.

Diversity in leadership is essential for building institutional capability and acknowledging the past deficiencies. Diversity should be a priority in addressing institutional challenges toward progress (Nixon, 2017; Smith 2014, 2015). Strengthening the positions that are working towards equity in and for diversity is vital. Often work related to diversity is under-resourced, non-priority measure, and has limitations in cultural capital within institutional administration (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006; Nixon, 2017, Williams, 2013). Utilizing CDOs as a means of diverse leadership has the job of enhancing compositional diversity of the university's student body and faculty (Banjeri, 2005; Williams, 2013; Williams & Clowney, 2007).

CDO identity foundations. Previous students have examined the organizational creation of a CDO's office through a lens for models and direct reporting structures (Parker, 2015; Leon, 2014; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Change and structure are inherent components of CDO work and are vital for the institutional diversity. Stakeholders at colleges and universities must start creating roles to change how diversity is carried out in a systemic way throughout their

campuses (Barceló, 2007; Nixon, 2015; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008). Even though research has shown certain efforts to change CDO work (Leon, 2010; Nixon, 2015), some studies have applied political and leadership views in foundational outlining. Research has also shown that CDO administration gives life to integrated effectiveness for action. Forming CDO roles commands a promise in a new vision for leadership around diversity efforts, which means investing in not only one person—a CDO—but in a unit for change in coordination for strategic institutional matters (Nixon, 2015; Williams & Clowney, 2007).

Previous studies regarding CDO foundational work focused on racial and gender diversity and were mostly contextualized in a Black/White paradigm. Contemporary CDOs operate with a broader understanding of diversity that includes sexual identity, economic background, military status, religion, immigration status, age, ability, and more (Harvey, 2014; Williams, 2013; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2006). The institutional leveraging of these various identities enhances the learning and development of students through intentional engagement and interactions, which in turn can improve the conditions for meeting outcomes (Harvey, 2014; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008). When leaders have an inclusive consideration for campus culture, they can gain sound results that will echo support from many community stakeholders. This, in turn, can impact how relationships are formed and transformed in relation to the notions of trust. As a result, a CDO can create opportunities for diversity and inclusion sustainability that will greatly affect institutions (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012; Harvey, 2014).

Understanding the CDO experience. Some critics perceive the CDO position as a costly and symbolic gesture of pacification to angry protestors (Harvey, 2014; Gose, 2013; Williams, 2013). In the past decade, the CDO role has begun to attract scholarly attention, and researchers are taking a critical approach to uncover the roots, rationale, challenges, and responsibilities of the CDO experience (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012; Leon, 2014, Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007,

2008, 2013). Creating the experience of a CDO begins with upper administration and should be supported with proper resources; ranging from human to monetary commitments from the president's office with connection to institutional mission and purpose (Leon, 2014; Williams, 2013; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013; Worthington et al., 2014). The CDO role as a high-ranking officer around diversity at institutions has emerged to act as a sign that illuminates a paradigm shift to students, faculty, and administrators, which has also made inroads into academic materials (Harvey, 2014; Worthington et al., 2014).

Understanding the experience of a CDO has no clear definition and there is no clear overall structure to the role. A CDO at colleges and universities acting as a highest-ranking leader in diversity relates to the power of implementing diversity plans and initiatives (Parker, 2015; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008, 2013). Other scholars offer an analogous definition of the role of these administrators. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) write:

> The CDO is a boundary-spanning senior administrative role that prioritizes diversity-themed organizational change as a shared priority at the highest level of leadership and governance. . . . The CDO is an integrative role that coordinates, leads, enhances, and in some instances supervises formal diversity capabilities of the institution in an effort to create an environment that is inclusive and excellent for all. (p. 32)

Approximately 70% of CDOs roles have been recently created in the last decade (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008). The position has increasingly become the archetypal role for administrators responsible for diversity at institutions in the United States (Leon, 2014; Parker, 2015; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008).

Critique of Previous Research

To add to the existing body of knowledge, methods should be utilized to analyze knowledge and gain understanding of CDOs, regarding their experiences between themselves, the

institutions that they impact, and their roles facilitating institutional change. The phenomenological approach makes it possible to understand the perspective of CDOs on the complexity in facilitating institutional change. Phenomenology is a methodological approach applied to veteran researchers that seeks to increase a deeper consideration in meaning making experiences (Patton, 2014). Phenomenology is the reflective study of the spirit of awareness as practiced from a view of a single-person (Smith, 2007). The purpose of the utilization of the phenomenological method is to extract people's first-person point of view so the experience of phenomena is understood at its starting point. In this study, phenomenological methods will allow for the deep and thick description necessary to uncover the descriptions of higher education CDO perspective.

Claims. While the literature surrounding the phenomenon of higher education CDOs have limited amount of information, most of the studies discussed in the literature review used a variety of approaches to reveal stories of either a person in a higher education CDO role or the perceived nature of the higher education CDO position structure. Rather than using a quantitative or a mixed method approach like many of the studies on higher education CDO work, the researcher of this study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach to capture many real experiences. The real experiences are critical in aiding understanding of the phenomenon investigation (Moustakas, 1994). While valuable and applicable in many areas, the lens of quantitative or mixed methods does not provide enough rich narrative description to accomplish the goal of reflecting on the complexity of human behavior (Moustakas, 1994).

Parker (2015) states that "qualitative inquiry allows scholars to design studies that inform our understanding of the research issue as it relates to context of the study's topic" (p. 75). There have been qualitative studies around higher education CDO work, but through further examination of published material, a lack of phenomenological methods was detected. The researcher must serve conduit for collection and examination for a qualitative study, and in doing so, he will have

the ability to provide rich descriptions on the comprehension of experiences for higher education CDOs and give opportunities in the process to better understand insights of the role on a deeper level that what is current among scholarship (Nixon, 2017).

Merits. According to Williams (2013), the definition of a CDO used in the previous studies depicts a CDO as someone who has a seat at the president and/or provost's cabinet, directs campus-wide diversity efforts, and has some level of authority and responsibility for holding departments and units accountable for diversity efforts, and is generally seen as the "face of diversity" at the institution's highest level. Kratt (2004) found that being the "face of diversity" and leading diversity efforts, there is a need for the higher education CDO in the role and the institutions to take additional steps to address the inconsistency in structure and challenge community members to address more difficult issues of diversity, including support. Many institutions strive to create and implement some type of plan to make the campus more inclusive for enriching the lives of community members, with special focus on students. The bigger question, however, lies in the leadership of these coordinating efforts to sustain the institutional impact (Milem et al., 2005).

Leon (2014) proposes keeping qualitative sampling to smaller numbers for achieving more intimate detailed experiences; from a standpoint of telling stories of who leads campus change around diversity. CDOs exist in a variety of organizations, from being the ones leading diversity efforts at institutions; they are responsible for planning, implementing, and assessing diversity and inclusion efforts, such as organizational outreach, programming, and support services (Ruiz-Mesa, 2016; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Moustakas (1994) believes a strong way to tell the story is through utilizing phenomenological semistructured open-ended interviews in order to view the human experience with the aim to describe as precisely as possible the pre-reflective phenomenon of higher education CDOs.

Literature limitations in CDO work in higher education. A challenge in the literature for CDOs in higher education is a clear path in organizational structure, which connects to prioritizing intuitional needs. Another need that is missing in diversity among stakeholders at colleges and universities is the commitment to clear procedures and measures that provide essential leadership to diversity efforts (Paredes-Collins, 2009). Stakeholders at colleges and universities need to devote intentional time and care to diversity work. Researchers have shown impact on strategic planning and process around diversity (Haralu, 2005). The journey for difference, justice, and fairness among stakeholders at colleges and universities has been historical linked to the vision and mission of these institutions. Elements that make institutions operate are impacted by diverse set of resources, and outcomes in each of these areas impact every aspect of institutional life (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013). This current research investigating the CDO experience is significant and yet limited on articulating clear organizational structure, because many of the previous studies conducted on colleges and diversity have only focused on issues of admissions, academics, and inclusivity (Perez, 2013).

Kotter (1995) writes that "the most general lesson to be learned from the more successful cases is that the change process goes through a series of phases that, in total, usually require a considerable length of time" (p. 1). Increasingly, relevant administration commitments for meeting the task of sustaining diversity at colleges and universities is crucial and the challenges of embracing diversity within higher education have received more attention recently (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013). Although hiring CDOs to lead these institutional efforts may enable one way to create awareness around diversity at colleges and universities; institutional support is needed to give CDOs structure to supplant inclusive policies and measures (Wilson, 2013). In recent years, some researchers have attempted to examine diversity among institutions around issues of access, campus climate, and at times educational and scholarly mission (Perez, 2013). Missing is research

about clear sense of the role that higher education CDOs have and how institutions operate with a senior-level leader of diversity. Wilson (2013) points out:

> While the definition of diversity is broad, this study included but was not limited to the following: race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and physical abilities. . . . Given that this study touched on the sensitive topic of diversity, and very little research exists on the subject of higher education CDOs, qualitative research was chosen to capture not only the uniqueness of each higher education CDO who participated in the study, but to establish any common patterns, as well as inconsistencies, across them. (p. 434)

There have been some stakeholders at colleges and universities that made moves to become welcoming and inclusive on their campuses (Nussbaum & Chang, 2013). Yet again, what is missing is the information on what that process looks like to the leaders involved in making those significant strides.

Chapter 2 Summary

There is a heightened importance of the structural layout in utilizing the abilities of a higher education CDO (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012). Institutions can select many options on CDO organizational structure through different approaches or models for functional capacity and sustainability (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). This research identifies attributes of higher education CDOs, which will provide insight into dimensions of diversity, institutional change, institutional power, and collaboration. Then the goal is to share these findings with educational practitioners in a meaningful way that can be translated into creating institutional change through organizational structure and practices that increase the creditability of the higher education CDO among senior administration and the entire institution.

Early versions of the CDO position were assigned to improve structural diversity of the university's student body and personnel (Banjeri, 2005). Many of these early positions and minority offices were relegated to the margins of the institution and were tasked with working on low compositional diversity (Barcelo, 2007). During this early period of growing structural diversity in the past, providing time and energy for intentional engagement created stress; in some of the situations the stress resulted in student resistance, with demands to physical spaces for underrepresented student groups and inclusivity in personnel and academic materials (Nixon, 2017). According to Milem et al. (2005), institutions championed plans, but the lack of connection to the community created more discontent with efforts of diversity at the level of response.

The CDO role is a relatively new and rapidly growing executive leadership position in higher education administration (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Worthington et al. (2014) note that "Standards of practice that are responsive to the dynamic landscape of higher education will help to advance the professionalization of the CDO role as it relates to serving the increasingly diverse demographics of our nation" (p. 229). The organizational structure of the higher education CDO position is important to understand because it explains how the higher education CDO functions within the university (Leon, 2014). In higher educational institutions, there is an inconsistency of strategic plans and organization around diversity and of leadership in the efforts of managing initiatives for change (Parker, 2015).

At higher educational institutions, priority at senior levels look to the CDO role as an afterthought in some to most cases (Wilson, 2013). Many higher education CDOs are located throughout spaces within colleges and universities; these spaces and places may be in human resources or in academic affairs designations. With the specific designations, organizational structure may look different with support from the president's office with implementations of staff and financial backing to do diversity work (Parker, 2015). In some cases, higher education CDOs

have a direct line to the highest-ranking officer (the president) and other institutions may have an in-between administrator for the higher education CDO to report to (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Parker (2015) observes that "this structural uncertainty is an important issue because it relates to these institutions' capacity to maintain diverse, inclusive and welcoming environments for all students, faculty and staff" (p. 22).

Stakeholders at colleges and universities can give credibility to the area of diversity, just like other areas around the institution. Positions like provost or vice-president of information/chief information office/CIO were made to provide leadership in their respective area; the call to action is to treat diversity leadership the same way as other college and university administrators (Parker, 2015). Past research has highlighted positions like CIOs having the level of commitment as a provost/chief academic officer (CAO) and the same level of clarity in role duties at institutions (Penrod et al., 1990). The ambiguity is challenging because of role designation of a higher education CDOs; the blurred lines in ability to successfully create change hinders higher education CDO's leadership functionality (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Investigating and examining the phenomenon of higher education CDOs role and its ambiguity will create a space to better understand the actual versus the perceived operationalization of the CDO role in higher education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Numerous stakeholders at colleges and universities struggle with implementing institutional diversity commitments. Higher education institutions adopt various ways to support institutional diversity, such as diversity statements and diversity strategic plans embedded throughout campus culture. To address diversity on campus, an increasing number of colleges and universities have created senior-level positions to oversee diversity efforts, the CDO role. In this dissertation, ambiguity in the organizational structure of higher education CDO positions was the focus.

Introduction to Chapter 3

In this chapter, reasoning for using a phenomenological research design to examine CDO position ambiguity was presented. Highlighting the experiences of CDOs may inspire structural changes in higher education administrations to better support clear goals, responsibilities, and infrastructure, therefore I focused the conceptual framework on diversity, institutional change, institutional power, and collaboration. The role of a CDO is to sustainably connect diversity efforts at institutions. "In this context, sustainability, broadly defined, requires communities to increase their understanding that certain practices may have disparate impact on individuals from different groups" (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012, p. 30).

In formalizing a commitment to diversity, a CDO challenges campus community members to have that same commitment to diversity. It is essential for CDOs to have influence and support to be a holistic resource and have the power to enact initiatives for institutional change (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). It is important to understand what constraints a CDO faces and how position clarity would benefit higher education institutions. This chapter was separated into sections that offer insight into the study's methodology, research questions, purpose, design,

research population/sampling method, data collection, attributes, data analysis procedures, limitations, internal/external validation, expected findings, and ethical issues.

Research Questions

The main research question for this phenomenological study is: How do higher education CDOs describe their experiences with organizational-structure role ambiguity? "Ambiguity," for the purpose of this study, relates to the undefined organizational structures that govern CDOs' roles. According to Nixon (2017), senior-level diversity administrator, or CDO, organizational structure differs from higher education institution to higher education institution. Leon (2014) noted that poorly structured CDO positions continue to create barriers at many higher education institutions.

Research subquestions. The following subquestions guided the examination of specific aspects of ambiguity in the CDO role.

- How do CDOs describe ambiguity in the organizational structure of their roles?
- How do CDOs enact the requirements of their positions while working within ambiguous organizational structures?
- What professional and personal characteristics help CDOs work within ambiguous organizational structures?

Purpose and Design of the Study

Recently, colleges and universities have become more inclusive—attracting more students from diverse backgrounds, but administrators must address multiple related issues. Institutional issues include access and success, campus climate, academics, and hiring practices. These issues facing higher education institutions require a focus on diversity leadership. Wilson (2013) noted that CDOs can be leaders within an institution's president's cabinet; leaders who can plan, direct, and enhance formal diversity efforts for institutional vitality. Perez (2013) suggested hiring CDOs

as a method for helping stakeholders at colleges and universities progress diversity change on campus; a CDO's positive impact could extend to overseeing efforts where institutions may have struggled in areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Perez, 2013). Researchers have found significance in advancing the CDO role, with a need to support and structure the role for individual institutions (Perez, 2013; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Purpose. Higher education literature about CDOs leading campus diversity efforts have been usually comprised of mixed methods research at 4-year public institutions and has often been limited to quantitative approaches (Williams, 2013). An evident trend in the current literature is the need for more qualitative phenomenological research and specifically, an effort to understand the perspectives of higher education CDOs leading through ambiguity in their organizational structure; therefore, the exploration of identifiable patterns in CDOs' experiences with ambiguity at their institutions will help frame better-constructed positions. I aspire to become a CDO in higher education, and informally listening to people working in diversity in higher education has provided me the curiosity to know more about higher education CDOs.

It is important to form new perspectives in higher education through describing and understanding the experiences of CDOs. According to Paredes-Collins (2009), college stakeholders make it a practice to promote a mission-centered education through all their members, including institutional outreach through academic classes, recruitment (of faculty, staff, and students), and finance —with little to no mentoring in diversity commitment. Initiatives related to diversity at higher education institutions often primarily focus on race/ethnicity, but diversity encompasses more. This study on CDOs will not only help many to understand the experiences of CDOs but also help many to understand the ambiguity faced in the CDO role.

There are models, as noted in Chapter 2, that describe different ways on how higher education institutions can better utilize senior-level diversity officers (Leon, 2014). CDOs who

provide leadership in the areas of diversity often have minimal organizational structure for implementing initiatives. Wilson (2013) found that the practice of tokenism sometimes places CDOs as symbols of viable organizational leadership with functional invisibility. CDOs, in their higher education roles, are often met with criticism for functioning as symbols but lacking support and clear responsibilities for leading diversity efforts on campuses. There is a need to add proper infrastructure to support high level positions such as CDOs (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Literature about higher education institutions suggested that contemporary diversity efforts are deeply rooted in an incomplete or misguided comprehension of the history, purpose, and position of CDOs (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). Connecting the purpose of this study and the type of institution, describing how CDOs operate in their roles will shed light on the ambiguity in the structures and experiences.

Design. A phenomenological design and a hermeneutic approach to investigate the research questions of the phenomenon about CDOs and the ambiguity in the organizational structure was used in this study. Kafle (2011) described hermeneutic phenomenology as focusing on the subjective experiences of people with the aim of uncovering lived perspectives through an interpretive description process. According to van Manen (1990), hermeneutic phenomenology is one-part sociology and one-part philosophy, providing insight into an individual's background to gain an understanding of the world they live in. Van Manen (1990) also suggested there are six factors involved in executing hermeneutic phenomenology:

- focusing on a phenomenon (with a collective interest in impacting societal groups);
- examining lived experience instead of intellectualizing it;
- using moments to think of vital themes (which illustrates the phenomenon);
- using the tools of writing and rewriting to explain the phenomenon;
- deploying a durable and focused academic connection to the phenomenon; and

- harmonizing the study framework (bearing in mind fragments and completeness).

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) suggested the critical nature of interpretive accounts drives the importance of phenomenology and efforts toward showcasing lived experiences (Kafle, 2011). Using a hermeneutic approach necessitates a commitment to recording a deep and rich description of a participant's story and, at the same time, supports what participants experience within their environments as impactful on their experiences. Van Manen (1990) highlighted that a researcher using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach must go through a process of introspection with the hope of becoming aware of one's cultural norms and understandings. Using this approach in this study, preexisting ideas were tabled and engage in the examination experience with an open mind. With the phenomenon of the ambiguity, I was able to better understand vague and unclear goals about institutional diversity through engaging with CDOs. Unclear goals can be in potential conflict with campus stakeholders or other senior-level administrative colleagues (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

In supporting the process of phenomena meaning-making (Nixon, 2017), collected and analyzed data from each participant provided rich descriptions regarding CDOs' experiences. Giorgi (2012) suggested that the purpose behind a phenomenological approach, understanding one's experience, gives integrity to the lived human elements in the phenomena. The driving force of this study involves understanding the CDOs' experiences and how ambiguity exists in their roles. This is important to investigate how the phenomenon about ambiguity affects power and influence, which addresses the illusion of power and authority institutions give to make campus change on diversity. Kezar (2001) noted that stakeholders at colleges and universities create ambiguous power and authority structures

Van Manen (1990) explained that phenomenology is inquiry into a phenomenon that illuminates lived experiences. Detailing the lived experiences of CDOs will bring richness and an

awareness that will enhance this area of higher education. As a phenomenological approach, in-depth one-to-one interviews was appropriate for detailing the position trials of a CDO. According to Moustakas (1994), hermeneutic phenomenological approaches reveal lived experiences, and an outline may appear that provided an area of cultivation through which to deduce reliable implications about the phenomenon's spirit from the participant's lived experience.

Elements of the phenomenon consists of CDOs carving out space with limited resources and direction of where their institutions expect in diversity efforts. Nixon (2017) found that CDOs function with ambiguous expectations with their administrative senior-level peers seen with clear organizationally boundaries. The challenge within this ambiguity for CDOs is the institutional support and realization from members of campuses knowing how important supporting CDOs are in transforming the campus landscape, in order to advance diversity issues. In the design, created an ability to discover outlines or patterns through this hermeneutic phenomenological approach to better understand the ambiguity and role of CDOs. Using the approach, helped check bias and be objective regarding the participant CDOs' experiences.

Research Population and Sampling Method

Research population. Foundational evidence from the literature review points to a likelihood of phenomenologically discoverable signs, patterns, and indicators that higher education institutions might utilize to create a better-defined role for senior-level leadership around diversity and to support CDOs at their respective institutions. CDOs face challenges that impact leadership and mental capacities, and yet these senior leaders contribute to the academic process at institutions in exceptional ways (Chang, Longman, & Franco, 2014). With a focus on college stakeholders for examining senior-level leadership in diversity given the limitations in current research around such institutions. College stakeholders have devoted time to assessing and

implementing diversity organizational structure and initiatives, but attempts have been minimal or nonexistent in some cases (Perez, 2013).

The population in this study are CDOs in higher education and at any level of higher education (i.e., 4-year, 2-year, private, public). Studying CDOs with an open level approach increases the likelihood that the study findings will reflect differences or different perspectives (Creswell, 2007). The subjects of the research population and the source of all material and data collection were each participants' articulation of lived experiences. The CDO experience—leading through ambiguity within the organizational structure of a higher educational setting—was the center of this study. The targeted population is responsible for all aspects of the diversity and inclusion strategy and plan, including implementation, promotion, and sustainment. This is important given institutional strategic mandate within higher education, with research studies initiated on diversity efforts from points of access, campus climate, and mission.

Sampling method. Purposive sampling gives the participants in this qualitative study the ability to enlighten many higher educators about the research problem and the phenomena under study by sharing their understanding (Kafle, 2011). It is critical to hear from CDOs directly—to capture their own goals, day-to-day operational realities, strategic mindset functionalities, concerns, and trials—in order to understand complete, lived experiences. Moustakas (1994) provided the following measures for selecting a study sample: the research participant has experienced the phenomenon, is interested in understanding its nature and meanings, is willing to partake in an extensive interview, is willing to participate in a follow-up interview if needed, allows the investigator the option to record or videotape the interview, and allows the investigator the option to publish the data in a dissertation and other publications.

Purposive sampling of 14 CDOs open to an interview process was used in the study. This sampling method is a type of nonprobability sampling; purposefully identify and selecting each

participant with advisement assistance from the research gatherings from organizations such as National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) was also utilized. Since each participant will have a connection of being a CDO, their insight was vital for investigating the shared experiences with the phenomenon of ambiguity in the role and organizational-structure of a CDO.

Purposefully selected information-rich insights will create an in-depth understanding of the factors that influence how CDOs live through their role experiences (Nixon, 2017). Deliberately selecting CDOs from the standpoint of each person best representing and contributing to the phenomenon being studied assisted the research (Wilson, 2013). These CDOs will provide information about their experiences in their CDO roles at colleges and universities. According to Creswell (2007), to study a phenomenon, a range of 5 to 25 participants would justify understanding and showcase the lived experiences. Each of the 14 participants were selected because of their role as a senior-level officer and as point of contact for implementing diversity initiatives throughout their respective institutions. The following measures used to select the CDOs in this study (Wilson, 2013):

- designation as the CDO at their institution,
- institutional association with higher education, and
- geographical location throughout the U.S.

Sampling procedure. With Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, communication was sent to various higher educational associations (including NADOHE) for reaching out to CDOs who might participate in this study. After selecting the CDOs for the study, they signed a consent form before the interviews take place. Signing consent adds protection and assurances that are vital for establishing proper research contact, including, primarily, confidentiality (Wilson, 2013). Calls and/or emails to each CDO were made to discuss the purpose of the study and to

explain the process (Moustakas, 1994). Fourteen participants were interviewed with a semistructured focus, which captured a rich description of the participants' lived experiences as CDOs. Each CDO in this study had experience in senior-level administration in higher education. This study's sampling included pseudonyms for each participant and their institutions. This is important to a phenomenological study, because of the focus on individual lived experience and protecting the participants in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Each interview lasted between 45–60 minutes per participant.

Instrumentation

Interpretation is a tool connected to the hermeneutic approach of the study. A primary qualitative research tool for collecting data is a researcher him or herself (Kafle, 2011). Interviewing is probing the retelling of lived experience narratives to make meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). Data was collected through a set of semistructured interview protocol questions to investigate the phenomenon of the ambiguity in the role of CDOs and understanding their experiences in the study. The set of predetermined interview questions were a part of the study's instrument. The goal of this study was to produce data that reveals the participants' understanding of their CDO experiences with the phenomenon of organizational-structure ambiguity. Without a clear message of institutional support and vision for diversity and inclusion, CDOs can be in a precarious position about finding and creating ways to support changes in policies and practices that are embedded within exclusionary, broad, or ambiguous discourse (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

14 interested higher education CDOs were solicited and two alternates for backup participant purposes if the initially selected participants decline the offer to participate in the study (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The following interview materials were used:

- an audio recording device and an external power source for charging as needed throughout the interview meeting,
- blank consent forms,
- note paper (for observations/notes), and
- an interview protocol with space to write notes and for each participant to read along with as needed

The interview questions were open-ended, designed to provide opportunities for participants to share detailed descriptions. Some of the interview questions focused on describing their first year or years being a CDO and describing what the role looks and feels like in their perspective. There was a need to understand how they have operated in the role during their orientation to the role and the campus. Other questions focus on challenges CDOs have encountered in their experiences and naming accomplishments during their experience as a CDO. Asking these questions will help the investigation and answer the research questions about ambiguity in the organizational-structure of the role.

In addition, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, read and reread the transcripts, and replay the interviews, making detailed notes and charts of the emerging themes, patterns, and meanings. Each interview session was 45–60 minutes with CDOs via online video conferencing platform. During interviews in phenomenological studies, researchers should expect to be adept at understanding the experiences being shared by the participant, to be able to interpret the participant's words in order to create a sense of meaning and purpose during and after the interview (Kafle, 2011). As well as needing good interview skills, a researcher must ensure that the research questions are the foundation upon which discussion of the research problem can be thoroughly assessed (Creswell, 2007). As the key instrument in the qualitative research study, I

have the skills and experience to generate an authentic conversation with the participants and to make certain the research problem was addressed, examined, and interpreted appropriately.

Data Collection

The purpose of data collection in phenomenological research is to reveal the (higher educational) world as experienced by the participants through their life stories (Kafle, 2011). Phenomenology's purpose is to give justice to the lived aspects of human phenomena by understanding how people lived through their actual experiences (Giorgi, 2012). Qualitative data through interviews were collected. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) composed of open-ended questions was developed; the predetermined interview questions were connected to the primary research question and subquestions. The participants conversed with me during the interviews, focusing on a defined set of open-ended questions (questions starting with "what" or "how") to produce heightened perspectives and a greater understanding of higher education CDOs' experiences. Open-ended interviewing style and use of active listening skills to gather data will lead to a textual and structural description of the phenomenon (Kafle, 2011). In addition, documentation by making notes was created and recording participant observations throughout the interview was further analysis.

The individual interviews were conducted during the 2019 calendar year. Information through 45–60 minute interviews with each CDO participant at their preferred locations were gathered. Interviewing at length is a deep approach that creates an intentional atmosphere conducive to understanding each participant's lived experience in sharing context (Seidman, 2013). In addition, because the conducted interviews in an agreed upon location, participants felt more comfortable and motivated to disclose certain elements of their lived experiences; the interviews were conversational and open-ended to build connection with participants, so they might not restrict expression of their experiences (Hancock, 1998).

The interviews focused on the participants' personal and professional backgrounds and on their journeys/careers in higher education as CDOs. Seidman (2013) described structuring the interview process as follows: first, the context of the participants' experiences was documented; second, participants were permitted to restructure the specifics of their experiences within the background in which they ensued; and third, the participants were reassured and allow them to reflect on and embrace the meaning their experiences. Following this framework, open-ended questions to encourage the participants to share their insights, states of mind, and other components of their lives that might be of importance to this study were used (Patton, 2014). Audio recording was used in the interviews. An outsourced party will professionally transcribe all recordings. Each participant was asked to conduct a review of their interview's typed transcript for accuracy and to address any misinterpretation of data.

Though the guided interview meetings begun with initial questions to start the conversation, conversation directions will follow participants' leads. During phenomenological interview questioning, both questions and answers will evolve; participants were asked follow-up questions or for clarification of details as needed during interviews and/or between interview periods. Notes were taken to supplement interview data, capturing nonverbal information (such as the participant's body language) that will not be captured on the audio recording. Notes were written and explanatory comments directly on the question guide to be used for each interview. Vivid information was noted—such as time, place, and location—as well as observations regarding interactions. Achieving a point of saturation was the goal in conducting each participant's interview. Merriam (2009) described saturation in research as an indicator of triangulation; that is, during data collection, a researcher recalls moments in the study repeatedly until no new information surfaces.

Identification of Attributes

The interview protocol was used (see Appendix A) with each interview to gather data on the ontology (or *what*) of each participant's lived experience and on the epistemology (or *how*) of their experiences. *Priori* attributes to cluster similar descriptors from participants' experiences to make meaning in the study were utilized. In the coding process, four attributes were linked from the literature—inclusive excellence, leadership, identity, and community—with each research subquestion attribute in this study—prior, during, and after the experience. Each attribute is based on research literature.

"Inclusive excellence" in higher education means effectively integrating diversity initiatives into all aspects of the institution (Milem et al., 2005). "Leadership" is defined as a purposeful process in which values are deeply grounded; in the case of higher education, leadership is source of empowerment through structure and/or influence (Astin & Astin, 2000). "Identity," as a defined theme, is connected to the higher education context through cultural or structural roles and supportive service practices (Kuh, 2002; Porter, 2006). And "community" is defined as connections to campus stakeholders (Jongbloed, Enders, & Salerno, 2008).

In this study, these attributes were connected to four emergent themes. As explained in Chapter 2 ("CDODF"), the conceptual framework of this study was erected through four lenses: diversity, institutional change, institutional power, and collaboration. By categorizing and operationalizing the literature review and sub-research question attributes through the conceptual framework, I deduced growth in the essence of the participants' experiences around ambiguity as CDOs in higher education.

Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze the study's data, the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework to connect understanding and meaning was utilized. This framework extricates the meaning each

participant's personal experiences (Smith & Olson, 2008). Before the data was analyzed, each participant had a chance to engage in member checking of research materials to ensure accurate telling of their individual stories. Three phases of data analysis were initiated: reviewing transcript notes, identifying note taking themes, and clustering units of meaning alongside connecting relationships to themes. In continuously reviewing and note-taking, A system of intentional data analysis was created. The following tools for system analysis: (a) highlighting statements or phrases reflecting each participant's experiences (horizontalization), (b) clustering topics of meaning into themes using a discerning approach, (c) finding descriptive wording for categories to connect experiences to the phenomenon, and (d) finding relational and structural descriptions related to each participant's experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1999).

The first stage of data analysis involved continuously reviewing each participant's transcripts and listening to the audio recordings. Organizing, preparing, and reviewing gave me a good understanding of the information and revealed its general meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1999). Coding followed. The coding process arranged information into sections before transitioning to meaning making (Creswell, 2007). From the initial interpreting of notes through the later readings, was an ability to engage with semantic content and language was created. In this process, reflection from the stance endorsed by van Manen (1990) happened, assuming an all-inclusive view of each participant's lived experiences before trying to split the defined experiences into parts.

The second stage of data analysis created themes from the data. In this stage, a vital part of the collection process analyzed the data and found themes to build credibility in this study (Kafle, 2011). IPA analysis in second-stage data analysis was not used, but IPA analysis will still hold value in breaking down initial data into three types of observations: descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual. Descriptive remarks will describe the content of what the participant said, linguistic

remarks will focus on the specific use of language, and conceptual comments will connote level of inquiry (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

In second stage data analysis, I placed comments and notes into emerging themes. The analytical focus shifted from pure data to notes interpreted, connected in the transcript. Making and annotating the transcript will comprise what phenomenologists call the hermeneutic circle. This cycle will reveal the part in relation to the whole, and the whole was deduced in relation to the part (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Detecting emerging themes will mean interpreting the storytelling from the participants' perspectives, incorporating notes from written word. In this stage, a deeper level of conception was created, which will impact the study's analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Stages three and four of (final) data analysis consisted of clustering and forming relationships within emerging themes. To understand the human experience of CDOs, it was vital to detail history to make meaning of the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The importance of final stage data analysis was to illuminate: (a) interpretations of the essence of the *what* and *how* participants experienced (in) the phenomenon; (b) examinations of understandings and reflections, ensuring depictions of each participant's lived experience meanings and finding commonalities that bridge relationships throughout experiences; and (c) accomplishment of full, collected information from each participant with enough assistance from notes and detailed research to create emerging themes, building credibility in the analysis (Creswell, 2007). A created data analysis matrix helped with gathering and analyzing the bridge between the research questions, conceptual framework, interview protocol, and emergent themes to illustrate the interworkings of the study.

Limitations of the Research Design

There were limitations within this study, which are worth noting. One limitation was connected to time and financial resources—having a single interview session visit with each CDO for a short period of time. It was a desire to interview in-person, but technology will most likely be utilized to complete most of the interviews. This interview technology was through an online video conferencing platform. Fortunately, using phenomenological methods is well suited to researching a smaller sampling of participants.

A second limitation was situating the researcher (me) as the primary study instrument. I did not influence the data or predetermine the themes to negatively impact the universal approach of this study (Patton, 2014). Qualitative studies often work best with educators and randomized samples. The quality of the research will afford rich and deep connections, but a person may never quite understand the experience of another individual or an organization (Patton, 2014).

Validation

Issues of validation, credibility, and dependability was important considerations in the design and implementation of this qualitative research study (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, a hermeneutical approach to interpret each study participant's lived experiences was used. Structure, process, and practice during the participant interviews with an objective of reducing the influence between me and the interviewee regarding the recreation of participants' lived experiences were also used (Seidman, 2013). Bracketing, coding, and member checking will build continuity in this study; each process will help to build a solid foundation for the research and to detail the participants' point of views. Situating myself as the main instrument of the study was a productive opportunity; data collection and analysis with ability, diplomacy, and thoughtfulness were approached (Seidman, 2013).

Bracketing methods to assist in controlling bias were utilized; through this measure, I identified predetermined influences about the phenomena to avoid bias during interpretative analysis. Munhall and Boyd (2000) suggested researchers must set aside personal, biased attitudes in describing others' lived experiences. Coding to the conceptual framework of this study were connected. Continuous engagement with themes and coded information will help to prevent unnecessary checking of research transcripts (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Interviewing opportunities enhanced the credibility of the data alongside uninterrupted transcript checking for reliability. An outside party carefully reviewed transcribed data, and each participant received a copy of their interview transcripts. This part of the process will give the participants a chance to check for accuracy and to address any misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the information provided. Member checking guaranteed the correctness of the transcribed interviews. Last, to solidify the rich and thick description interview process, Techniques of reflective inquiry and active listening were used; this approach helped to triangulate and validate data sources.

Credibility. According to Guba and Lincoln (1999), credibility leads to results that are produced from solid discoveries. Credibility by capturing rich, thick data regarding lived experiences from multiple viewpoints was developed. Hancock (1998) found that it is important to gain a deep appreciation of the phenomenon in focus, which lends more credibility to the study. It was important to value, without bias, how everyone in this study shares their stories, and, given that each person is an expert in their perspective, each participant's input will only add more credibility. This view suggests member checking was a vital approach for establishing credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1999).

According to Creswell (2007), credibility is attained when a researcher evaluates the data by reflecting, sifting, exploring, judging its relevance and meaning, and developing themes and essences that correctly denote the phenomenon experienced. To further enhance this study's

credibility and to ensure that participants' accounts were analyzed and interpreted as planned the participating CDOs were consulted during and after each interview to check for consideration and accuracy (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The CDO participants delivered essential evidence as reliable and credible information, validating the themes and meanings as well as offering their comments, feedback, and revisions to the data collection. After conducting a review of the information, group and theme information, linking CDOs and their lived experiences were created.

Dependability. Being consistent with research methods and participants brings about dependability, an idea supporting steadiness and pathways for reasonable change in research (Erlandson et al., 1993). The study's findings were not universally generalizable, given that this study examines the lived experiences of individual CDOs at higher educational institutions. Each lived experience may represent different challenges in leading diversity efforts at various faith-based or secular institutions, though dependability were accomplished through the research method of auditing (Creswell, 2007). Reviewing literature, collecting data, and checking in with each participant will contribute to maintaining the dependability of the study, which, collectively, was an auditing process. Auditing allows for depth and the ability to uncover meaning behind research text and storytelling (Kafle, 2011). Last, utilizing software to aid this study's dependability was planned. A goal was to use Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) programs such as Microsoft Word and Excel, along with ATLAS.ti (Version 7.0.85.) to ensure text accuracy during the research process.

Expected Findings

Since the approach was a qualitative study through phenomenological hermeneutics, I reviewed expected findings throughout the research process. A learning desire was met from listening and understanding each participant's lived experiences. Using bracketing assisted me in

acknowledging personal bias concerning existing knowledge of CDOs in higher education. Gratefully, the literature regarding CDOs and higher education will aid me in avoiding bias and in grounding the validity, credibility, and dependability of this study; each participant also elevated the study through recreation of their lived experiences.

Seidman (2013) explained that grouping or clustering the phenomenon helps in meaning making and understanding the essence of the lived experiences being shared. Higher educational institutions want to meet the needs of a changing campus landscape, and, in that change, CDOs are often looked to as the "faces" of diversity efforts for campuses (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). Considering CDOs as "faces" of diversity efforts, there was an urgency to know what it means to be that "face" and to better understand the ambiguity that surrounds the charge of being that "face." There was an expectation to produce findings to better understand the ambiguity in CDO positions and to learn how each participating CDO has led at a higher educational institution.

Ethical Issues

Conducting phenomenological hermeneutic research comprises ethical challenges (Kafle, 2011). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), any researcher must perform heightened awareness, anticipating ethical issues that may arise during the research process. Trust is also important in the research process, and it falls on the researcher to build that trust with their participants (human subjects). A researcher needs to continuously remind themselves that research materials and exchanges are sensitive in nature. The responsibility to protect participants is vital in a study; with developed trust, researchers must continue to promote and maintain integrity, persevering against wrongdoing that might impact institutions (Creswell, 2007). To gain the trust of each participant, each participant reviewed and signed an informed consent form; this safety method established participation in this study. Providing participant assurance is the equitable thing to do in any research study. In this study, each participant understood that they could excuse

themselves from the study at any given time without giving cause or receiving backlash from me (the researcher). The CDOs and I kept a copy of the signed consent form for their records.

Confidentiality was provided to protect each participant by not using their actual names, which could compromise identities. Text-recorded interviews were placed in a private setting to guarantee privacy and confidentiality. Safeguards were in place with all electronic recording devices bearing information attained for the study; these devices are only be accessible to me (the researcher). Further, each participant's identifying information from written notes was removed. The collected data was stored on a private external jump drive for further protection and will lock it in a cabinet when not being used. Once all data is transcribed, each piece of audio recorded information was deleted for safety. Additionally, after three years from the time of participant interviews, data will be destroyed.

Conflict of interest assessment. There were no encounters of any conflict of interest during the study. With the approval of the IRB, a research study is a federal guideline for all conducted research, guaranteeing that no conflict of interest will be violated with respect to the protection of the study population (University of Minnesota, 2010). No foreseeable conflict of interest impacted the study from financial or non-financial and indirect or direct standpoints. Additionally, no conflict of interest will occur in relation to the human participants involved in the study. This study had a reduced potential conflict of interest risk by not including any participant and affiliated institution names in the study's documentation.

Researcher's position. According to Creswell (2007), making sense of human experiences by the people that live through those experiences is the goal of phenomenology, gaining understanding from expression. The academic and social purpose of this study revealed possible complications experienced by CDOs in higher education. The study revealed a mixture of interactions that might be useful in institutional development for stakeholders at colleges and

universities. A significant consideration in the study is my career aspiration to become a CDO. My university involvement will afford an understanding of the potential struggles experienced by CDOs. As a higher educational professional working in diversity affairs, there was awareness of the study's potential positive impact on current and future institutional experiences; however, such personal experiences could make it difficult to guarantee clean bracketing. I was aware of the need to keep steady and to ensure bracketing to protect participants and to guarantee ethical pursuit of data collection and analysis.

There are several methods available to execute phenomenology in qualitative research; the best approach to utilize was the hermeneutic approach. According to Kafle (2011), hermeneutic phenomenology allows researchers to suspend their personal opinions from research. Utilizing this approach, helped to proceed with such suspension using *epoché*—limiting bias, functioning within the study only as researcher, and listening to participants (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). *Epoché* is designed to gain an understanding of things, matters, and thoughts. The challenge refrained from creating a position while viewing the crucial elements of a situation. Seidman (2013) claimed that retelling stories of lived experiences has been vital in making meaning of human lives. Using *epoché* helped the process an honest way of telling narratives without being influenced by a counternarrative of biases and preconceived views. From a distilled essence of each lived experience as told by the participants from this study, readers will be able to garner a deeper level of awareness of the phenomenon of being a CDO.

New perspectives were embraced and created new insights based on past knowledge gained from literature on the topic; together, this will bring a newness to existing career aspirations. Some assumptions in this study were made, including that participants would reveal many issues faced by colleges' and universities' CDOs in their experiences concerning their role ambiguity. Some of the assumed different issues might include work effort prioritization, influence, connection

resistance, lack of support, and institutional mission and vision limitations. Further issues might include family and social pressures surrounding championing diversity work. The pathway to becoming a CDO may not be so direct; it is not a traditional position, such as being a chief academic officer or chief human resources officer. There are a lot of stressors that might impact the role of CDO and the person who lives out that role. Certain stakeholders might not be welcoming to senior leadership focusing on diversity work with stakeholders at colleges and universities, given that "diversity" might mean certain debated elements of diversity recognized or put in focus.

Ethical issues in the study. This study will present minimum risk to the participants and me (the researcher). An open-ended interview style will allow participants to be reflective and to have a sense of autonomy in their conservations. A phenomenological interview will make divisions between appearances and essences and among elements within each participant's experiences (Kafle, 2011). Consent of each participant was gained to collect their narratives, making sure participants were well informed of each interview location and time.

Throughout the interview process, a reassurance was given to each participant of their importance to the study. If the 45–60 minute interviews (a single interview session per participant) will present obstacles to the participants, accommodations were made as needed for each participant. The privacy of each participant during the interview process were ensured. Creative space of each participant was respected, and they felt comfortable in sharing pieces of their lives with a researcher. To further protect participant privacy, each participant was notified that they could excuse themselves from the research process at any time or delete any data they will provide me through final member checking. Additionally, I confirmed each participant's privacy and ensure confidentiality during data collection and analysis processes, as previously described in this chapter.

The interview process was designed to include explanation of the process and liberation tone-setting for the participants. A seriousness was the study's angle; the CDOs in this study spoke freely, without restrictions, and they were open in sharing their phenomenological perspectives and speaking truth to power. Such power might recharge the leaders in their goals of promoting diversity efforts at their institutions; it might also help them to release tension they might be retaining by living though their positional experiences. Overall, learning from the shared experiences of these college and university CDOs will provide study findings that impact how institutions can move forward with such positions and might even inspire future CDOs. I did not engage in dishonesty, in any way, in this research study.

Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter contained the purpose, measures, interviewing models, ethics, and data analysis comprising the study's inquiry into the ambiguous phenomenon of CDOs' experiences with their organizational-structure. Themes were gathered from the CDOs' perspectives to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to lead diversity efforts at higher education institutions through various strategies: engagement, collaboration, and formation leading to institutional change. Using a phenomenological method will illuminate the stories of people who can be viewed as unsung heroes and champions of enhancing inclusionary efforts with stakeholders at colleges and universities. Van Manen (1990) viewed phenomenological studies as opportunities to learn from transformative lived experiences, providing textual expression that gives a reader a chance to use reflective practice to make meaning of their own journey. Additionally, the study's results might inspire further conversation around additional diversity leadership experiences and how diversity leadership has manifested in other areas of higher education.

In Chapter 4, a presentation of the qualitative results surfaced from the phenomenological hermeneutic interviews, share the stories of each of the colleges' and universities' CDOs, and interconnect the emerging themes with each of the participants' experiences.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of CDOs with leading through ambiguity in their roles. It is important to provide support and structure to senior-level administrators leading diversity efforts with stakeholders at colleges and universities. According to Nixon (2017), senior-level diversity administrator or CDO organizational structure differs from higher education institution to higher education institution. Leon (2014) noted that poorly structured CDO positions continue to create barriers at many higher education institutions. The main question of the present research study were as follows: How do higher education CDOs describe their experiences with ambiguity in the organizational structure of their roles? "Ambiguity," for the purposes of this study and the main research question, relates to a CDO's experience with an ill-defined organizational structure that governs their role. Additional research questions of this study were as follows:

- How do CDOs describe ambiguity in the organizational structure of their roles?
- How do CDOs enact the requirements of their positions while working within ambiguous organizational structures?
- What professional and personal characteristics help CDOs work within ambiguous organizational structures?

Data was acquired for this study from semistructured interviews to explore how CDOs experience organizational ambiguity in their roles.

An exploration happened about CDOs' experiences leading despite organizational structure ambiguity by gathering stories in which CDOs made connections in their work. My official job title is Assistant Dean of Student Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Despite working in diversity work in higher education like the research participants, the role is not in the same capacity of a

CDO like the participants. Given the limited research in this area, this study's findings may lead to the development of additional strategies that may assist existing and/or aspiring CDOs. 14 participating CDOs were interviewed to gain insight regarding leading through ambiguity in CDOs' roles. Purposefully selected participants included those who would best represent and contribute to the phenomenon being studied (Wilson, 2013). The topic of this research and the source of all material and data collected were the lived experiences articulated by each participant.

I selected participants for this study from various databases (i.e., Google; colleges and universities' websites; and other national CDO network sites) through a purposeful sampling method, ultimately recruiting 14 CDO participants. The inclusion criteria for this study was CDOs employed for at least one year. These CDOs worked in higher education institutions. One of the goals of this study was to gain understanding from each CDO about the ambiguity they might face in their role. At the senior-administrative level, there is no other position at colleges and universities that focuses on diversity, which gives greater importance to researching CDO experiences. This study generated the need to learn about the experiences of CDOs and the selection of individuals who could address the ambiguity in organizational structure of the role. There were a limited number of CDOs working in higher education that shared the profile needed for this study.

I conducted the study through video conferencing technology with participants from across the U.S.; semistructured interviews provided data for exploring the research questions for providing the results of this phenomenological study. This qualitative data-gathering method fit the study's purpose. Data collection took place from May 2019 through June 2019. During this period, data was collected in two phases. The first phase involved one semistructured 45–60-minute interview with each of the 14 CDO participants. The second phase involved member checking for credibility and validity. Interviews for this study encompassed open-ended interview questions

connecting to the research questions. Copies of the transcribed interviews were given to the CDO participants for member checking, as member checking is a viable way of validating information (Stake, 2010). Allowing the study participants to review the data to confirm the interpretations of the data added credibility to the data acquired.

The collected data from the semistructured interviews was analyzed. Analyzing the collected data helped to identify significant statements and recurring patterns, phrases, and themes (Creswell, 2013) used within the educational setting being studied. There were four phases of data analysis in this study: reviewing transcript notes, identifying field note themes, clustering, and forming units of meaning alongside connecting relationships to themes. This chapter includes the description of the sample, the research methodology and analysis, and the summary of findings. The presentation of the data and results section showcases the different themes that emerged in this study. A summary concludes Chapter 4.

Description of the Sample

Participating CDOs were interviewed to gain insight regarding leading despite the ambiguity of the organizational structure in their roles, purposefully selecting the participants so that each person in their role would best represent and contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon (Wilson, 2013). The source of all material and data collected was the lived experiences articulated by each participant. This study focuses on a phenomenon comprised of CDO experiences while leading in ambiguous roles within higher education.

The inclusion criteria for this study was CDOs who had been in their roles for at least one year or more. Of the 14 participants, nine were female and five were male. In terms of race/ethnicity identities, eight were Black/African American, five were Hispanic/Latino/a, and one was of mixed race/ethnicity. All participants had postgraduate degrees. The CDOs who participated were scattered throughout the United States, and all worked in various levels in higher

education (i.e., 4-year institutions, 2-year, public, private). Each CDO shared experiences that matched the goal of this study (understanding leading despite ambiguity). Due to the differences in types of institutions in higher education, the pool of participants added richly diverse experiences to the data.

Research Methodology and Analysis

The research topic was examining the lived experiences of participants leading despite ambiguity in the organizational structures of their CDO roles. To determine the lived experience of the participants, phenomenological hermeneutic approach comprised of data collection techniques including interview questions and member checking was utilized. To support this study, participants were asked seven interview questions (see Appendix A) to conduct a thorough examination and gain an understanding of CDOs in higher education leading despite ambiguity in organizational structures. The use of interview questions allowed for the development of a more thorough understanding of what participants experienced when working within the ambiguous nature of their roles.

To support identifying themes and the coding process, I intended to use ATLAS.ti, a software program designed to assist in organizing and structuring data. This program is used to conceptualize research themes and codes emerging from interview question data. This system helps structure concepts in study analysis; however, during the initial analysis process, a determination was made to use this software program would not be beneficial and then a decision to utilize a manual review to complete data analysis was made. Manual review gave the study a richer analysis of the participants' lived experiences. Manual data review revealed 40 codes and four themes.

Moving through each of the prior stages to the final stage of data analysis illuminated the following: (a) interpretations of the essence of the phenomenon; (b) examinations of

understandings and reflections; and (c) accomplishment of full, collected information from each participant with enough assistance from notes and detailed research to create emerging themes, building credibility in the analysis (Creswell, 2007). A matrix was created (see Appendix B) that focused on meaningful statements derived from the data analyzed; this matrix displays impactful statements and the commonalities that connected experiences. In the data analysis, the four themes that emerged were as follows: ambiguity in the CDO position, resources necessary for success in the CDO position, resistance on campus toward the CDO position, and personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position.

This theme development process is displayed in Figure 2. Themes represented how the CDO participants lead despite the ambiguity of the organizational structure of their roles. CDOs were given pseudonyms to protect their identities and to ensure the confidentiality of their statements. The designated pseudonyms for the 14 participants were Participant A through Participant N. Ultimately, this study sought to identify what CDOs' experiences were when they led despite the ambiguity of organizational structures.

Interview Transcripts

Identifying Codes in the Data

Identity	Structure
Diversity	Policy
Relationships	Building
Mindfulness	Education
Collaboration	Transformative
Training	Resource
Experience	Excellence
Perspective	Capacity
Microaggression	Creditability
Inclusion	Infrastructure
Community	Strategic
Willingness	Social Justice
Equity	Culture
Change	Modeling
Adapt	Coordination
Understanding	Program
Students	Action
Development	Access
Faith	Opportunity
Race	Influence

Creating Themes

Ambiguity in the CDO position
Resources necessary for success in the CDO position
Resistance on campus toward the CDO position
Personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position

Figure 2. The process. How the identified codes generated themes of study.

Phenomenological research design. This study used a phenomenological design and a hermeneutic approach to investigate the research questions about CDOs and ambiguity in their organizational structures. Kafle (2011) described hermeneutic phenomenology as focusing on the subjective experiences of people with the aim of uncovering lived perspectives through an

interpretive description process. According to Van Manen (1990), hermeneutic phenomenology is one-part sociology and one-part philosophy, providing insight into an individual's background to gain an understanding of the world they live in. Using a hermeneutic approach necessitates a commitment to recording a deep and rich description of a participant's story and, at the same time, supports what participants experience within their environments as impactful on their experiences.

Given the determination to manually analyze the study's data, this study utilized the IPA framework to connect understanding and meaning. This framework extricates the meaning of each participant's personal experiences (Smith & Olson, 2008). Continuously reviewing and note-taking created a system of intentional data analysis. System analysis included the following tools: (a) highlighting statements or phrases reflecting each participant's experiences (horizontalization), (b) clustering topics of meaning into themes using a discerning approach, (c) finding descriptive wording for categories to connect experiences to the phenomenon, and (d) finding relational and structural descriptions related to each participant's experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1999). Visuals and examples of the study's system analysis are displayed within this chapter. After 14 interviews, comparable and common themes were noted, which indicated the point of saturation attainment. Due to this saturation and to discerning similar themes from both the interviews and the transcription of the interviews, a determination was made. There was enough data and information to start the analysis portion of the study.

A researcher using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach must go through a process of introspection with the hope of becoming aware of their cultural norms and understandings (van Manen, 1990). Using this approach in the present study, tabled preexisting ideas and engaged in the examination experience with an open mind. Concerning the phenomenon of CDO structural ambiguity, I was able to better understand vague and unclear goals regarding institutional diversity

by engaging with CDOs. Unclear goals can be in potential conflict with campus stakeholders or other senior-level administrative colleagues (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

Summary of the Findings

A qualitative phenomenological study to examine the lived experiences of CDOs was conducted. The participants' shared phenomenon included leading despite ambiguity in the organizational structures of their roles. Study themes included the following: ambiguity in the CDO position, resources necessary for success in the CDO position, resistance on campus toward the CDO position, and personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position. Participant interview themes to the research questions were linked and explained them in this chapter based on the participants' significant responses.

Ambiguity in the CDO position. In order to understand CDOs' experiences, it was important for me to hear, in participants' own words, how they described being a CDO. Participants found the tasks of creating goals, encountering unclear day-to-day realities, not feeling empowered to make strategic decisions, and having to make many concessions for other areas of campus to be frustrating. The challenges participants faced in leading were the core of this study of ambiguity. Ambiguity was the phenomenon and the first theme that arose in the study. In analyzing the data, a distinguished meaningful statement followed (see Appendix B): "There was no template for this role." Yet, senior-level leadership roles focusing on admissions, human resources, and even business often have a template for each position, introducing what is needed to operate in such a senior-level role.

The word "pain" came to mind in hearing the experiences from each participant and listening deeply to the challenges of ambiguity in their roles. For example, not all the participants directly reported to the president or were on the president's cabinet, which made it difficult for some of the participants to do their jobs effectively. Some participants shared that collaborating

with the president and having a place on their cabinet was ambiguous in nature. There may have been an unclear vision or a lack of understanding of the responsibilities needed for the participants to carry out their tasks for the campus. This caused great confusion for the participants and for their institutions.

Resources necessary for success in the CDO position. Despite having senior leadership status at colleges and universities, few CDOs have appropriate resources for operating at a high level (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). From participant interviews, a finding occurred that participants needed to be well-resourced to be successful in their roles, a second theme that arose in the present study. Each participant in the present study had access to different levels of resources. Each participant had a different reporting structure that impacted their position resources. Some lost units to supervise, and some gained units to supervise. All participants suggested that, once a CDO is resourced, the CDO should make sure to delegate to become more successful in their position. Participants felt this would help CDOs navigate the ambiguity in the role. All 14 of the participants shared that having resources would better equip a CDO to lead effectively and to facilitate new ways of sustaining change among a campus community.

Resistance on campus toward the CDO position. A third theme identified in this research was resistance on campus toward the participants. The CDOs believed they were in the only position accountable for diversity at their institutions, based on their experiences of resistance from their campus communities. Participants believed diversity should be a shared responsibility and should not solely fall on their leadership but on unit vice-presidents and institutional presidents; however, the participants in the present study more than felt the pressure to make sure diversity was embedded across college settings. In other words, CDOs dealing with unclear structures felt the need to take the lead to keep universities accountable on diversity efforts. Participants in the present study made connections through the following meaningful statement

(see Appendix B): “There is no accountability of infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion in some departments (such as academic affairs).”

Another form of resistance that the participants experienced was microaggressions on campus: “Microaggressions have impacted much of my work.” In terms of leading through the challenge of “microaggressions”—a term that means an individual who often unconsciously articulates a prejudiced approach toward a member of a marginalized group (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)—participants expressed either encountering these forms of attacks or having worked a lot on their campuses to help counter these attacks among students, administration, staff, and faculty. During the interviews, the participants shared the need to maintain self-care through tough times facing this form of resistance from campus members.

Personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position**.** The fourth theme that emerged during participant interviews related to personal characteristics that facilitated success. “When issues arise, I feel it’s my responsibility to resolve it” was a statement that participants resonated with in the present study. Study participants mentioned that valuing responsibility had created space for them to be successful dealing with issues in their roles. During the study, participants mentioned that having a positive mindset of deeply caring for diversity and inclusion had helped them be successful in their positions. Additionally, the participants’ family backgrounds and college years as students assisted in forming their personal characteristics, which facilitated success in their CDO experiences.

Each participant’s characteristic of a positive mindset for diversity and inclusion brought significant meaning to bear in their stories; in this regard, race and gender resonated with the study participants, with personal and professional implications. One of the meaningful statements shared by participants was the following: “Having a balance of sharing my own perspective and understanding others.” Participants spoke highly about the importance of reaching out to many

people to build an inclusive environment. All participants were eager to point out that having a positive mindset assisted in how they were able to lead campus community growth.

Presentation of the Data and Results

Study results are based on a dataset including participant experiences regarding the phenomenon of CDO role organizational structure ambiguity. These experiences created the significance of this research. The data suggest four major themes: (a) ambiguity in the CDO position, (b) resources necessary for success in the CDO position, (c) resistance on campus toward the CDO position, and (d) personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position. Each theme was tied to study interview questions, and, most importantly, to the present study research questions. Creswell (2013) suggested that, in a qualitative study, researchers need to explicitly state research questions. All four research questions guided the present study in producing a better understanding of the experiences of CDOs in higher education. More specifically, Kafle (2011) noted that it is vital to unveil life stories to better understand others' experiences. The following accounts, in that regard, are intended to help the reader understand the essence of the study participants' experiences with the phenomenon, framed around each theme.

Ambiguity in the CDO position. The first theme that emerged during the interviews was ambiguity in the CDO position. This theme addressed the first two study research questions. Participants described experiencing ambiguity in the role and how, at times, this ambiguity created barriers in their work. The participants explained experiencing ambiguity as an issue of having a job that was not clearly defined at a senior rank and being pressured into executing tasks that were incongruent with broader expectations. Many of the participants "felt like outsiders" at times in leading through the ambiguous natures of their roles. Though this may read as isolation through ambiguity, participants suggested the lack of clarity in their positions caused the feeling of being an outsider. Higher education institutions that have ill-fitted CDO organizational structures

experience ambiguity, which is a challenge to achieving outcomes, such as campus-wide diversity-related goals and objectives. As an example, Participant G shared their frustration with the ambiguity of their role:

> I have my life here at my current university . . . . It's interesting, I've done this drunk walk in terms of who I reported to because I thought early [about] the organizational culture issues. And I thought to myself, okay I need to report to the president. That would give me the political power to get some stuff done. Well, and I did. I went from . . . I've reported to three different people in the 20 years I've done this work. Having a lot of responsibility, but no authority.

Participant G described a high level of frustration, which resonated with other participants in the present study. Participant G illustrated how there is a need to set clear expectations and to have a clearer structure for CDOs in higher education. Participant M also described an experience of ambiguity in the position:

> The CDO role is a really interesting role because I think most institutions don't even know what the hell it means. My first year as a CDO, it was a lot of work. It was time consuming, that comes to mind. It was gratifying at some level in terms of folks reaching out and asking your thoughts on different issues pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion, but it was also, dissatisfying in some way. It requires so much of you. As a CDO, you don't know if you have the capacity and the cultural capital to influence.

Organizational structure barriers impede the advancement of CDO work. Accordingly, study participants agreed with the following meaningful statement: "Advancing, creating, and impacting spaces and climate for students." Participants believed that advancing work around diversity, equity, and inclusion could be a mission statement for the role, yet the participants faced the challenge of knowing such advancement was not the only mission for their institutions.

For example, consider a college that experiences a contentious race-related incident in its residence halls and that appoints a CDO with primary tasks associated with student programs, oversight of student services, student organization trainings, etc. This CDO structure includes a minimal budget that supports the programs, and the selected CDO has experience and an educational background fit for working with students. An ambiguous organizational structure might exist if the CDO's objectified functions are associated with faculty issues, discrimination, and equal opportunity compliance. Matters such as poorly defined job descriptions, unintentional strategies regarding organizational structuring of the office, or under-resourced staffing and budgets result in a CDO that is performing unintentional and unexpected job functions—leading to ineffectiveness in the role. Similar experiences have led participants in the present study to take charge of their own processes within such ambiguity. Participant F shared their experience, as follows:

> There was no accountability around one of my job tasks for bias protocol. It took me about a year to do that because I had to, I put a task force together and then I had to come up with the mission, the vision, and then run it through all of the governance structures.

Participant D similarly described ambiguity in their position:

> It felt undefined, un-planned-for. It felt like I was basically crafting something that no one had really took into consideration what it should really consist of. It felt like I was trying to meet 100 different expectations from so many different people in our community because my position was an inaugural position it was a brand-new position for the college and so it was created from students.

Participant E also shared regarding experiencing no job template and building from the ground up in the ambiguity of their CDO role:

> There was no, I really didn't have any directives from the president. And so, it was sort of like this unknown; well we know she's coming in to do this diversity work, but no one really had a sense of what that was going to look like. And I think just having established this office set us on a path where we have some clear goals, we have some clear, at this point, some clear actions that we're taking.

Not having a job template was a statement all CDO participants believed as truth, based on their experiences; being placed in a position did not mean they had clarity in what they were tasked to execute. Similar to Participant E, Participant I mentioned how they encountered ambiguity in their position and how they were able to operate:

> And even to this day, while there's been exponential growth in that role at the senior level, CDOs come in many shapes, flavors, and forms, if you will. So, I had to help define the role, help create the role, and help build a vision and an understanding of these terms and how the work of that office really was both informed by and responsive to the institutional mission.

Participant G shared a story regarding the frustration that can arise from such a mismatch of authority/expectations when it comes to the ambiguity in the CDO position:

> I'm not a department sheriff; I have no authority over the dean or anybody, whoever the appointed official is, whether it's a department chair, a director, [or] a dean. They hire who they're going to hire, which is fine, but I have no authority over it. But yet I have the expectation or the responsibility to diversify the work force, you know. These things are beyond my control, but yet, I'm expected to do something about it, whatever it is. I think that's been the frustrating part.

Like Participant G, other study participants agreed that any institution with CDO roles needs a clear vision for diversity and a commitment to giving power to CDOs to execute their tasks without ambiguity.

Resources necessary for success in the CDO position. As the second theme, the study participants viewed resources in various forms—either human or financial resources—as necessary for success in their CDO positions. In other words, the participants shared how they experienced the phenomenon, which created this theme of resources necessary for success in the position of CDO This theme addresses the third research question. . Participant J shared how gaining support from the executive level was a resource needed to be successful in their work:

> Well, I think you're going to note that I'm going to start this, and it's very important that [it] be emphasized: I have done nothing by myself, absolutely nothing. The challenge of this job is, if I cannot work with my colleagues at the executive level, and if I cannot find the creative community, then I am dead in the water. Literally, I cannot carry this. So, when I share with you the successes, it's on the shoulders of many that I say.

Participant J's passion was clear as they shared their experience, which led to revealing the need of a human resource in people at the executive level, their colleagues. Participant H also mentioned colleagues as a valuable resource in their success:

> First of all, I feel like we have done a good job at identifying champions of diversity and inclusion across our university system. And I think that's important. So, I'm grateful that we have come up with programming distinct ways to garner support from some of our diversity champions across our university system. I organized a diversity advisory council that consists of some of our best thinkers on our campus.

The creation and management of partnerships was connected to the success of CDOs, as revealed in the participants' experiences. Many participants divulged a desire to be a consistently

well-resourced CDO based on their experiences, especially in terms of collaborative efforts. Participant I revealed a meaningful experience related to leading with the resource of collaboration:

> Creating conversations, creating sustained engagement of senior leaders, to engage scholarly perspectives that are typically on the margins, dealing with issues around inclusion, justice, etcetera, on race, sexual orientation, etc. So, creating those spaces that have been sustained, the creation of developing strategic plans and investment for diversity, equity, and inclusion, helping institutions to see this work as being essential and a critical part of institutional mission, its success and excellence, and not an add-on—because we've been able to do that, the ability to develop metrics.

Reaching as many as possible throughout a campus environment would create a productive new narrative of support for CDOs and for the work that these senior-level administrators enact for colleges and universities. As participant experiences suggest, it takes a great deal of collaboration to build sustainable change and relationships that implant diversity work among many campus units.

Study participants described another resource for successfully structuring the CDO role; participant interviews pointed to the need to have infrastructure as a resource for success. Participant J stated, "In turn, what I had done, and I mentioned this earlier, I have had the good fortune of surrounding myself with people who are way smarter than me in this work." Study participants shared the need of staff as a vital resource to do the work of a CDO; the participating CDOs believed in this need to do their best work for their campuses. Participant D shared how they started out with no resources then changed their situation to become successful in their position:

> When I was first hired for a whole year, yeah, one year, it was just me and I had an administrative assistant. And then, a major reorganization in the college where, basically, I was given five major units under me, now, so about 65 direct report or employees that report up through me.

Participant L mentioned, more specifically, how such resources impacted their state system. This participant experienced the phenomenon of ambiguity at different stages as a CDO. The most recent, and most evolved, experience for Participant L was as follows: "I have a board committee for diversity, equity, and inclusion for the board of trustees for our system and six direct reports." From listening to the participants, such as Participant L, I learned that having direct contact with the board of trustees elevated the reach of CDOs. Colleges and universities with boards of trustees hold a lot of power and influence. From what Participant L described, having an engaged board of trustees was not as common in their previous CDO experiences. Having a board of trustees involved with the CDO gives the person in the CDO position leverage to garner more resources to be successful in their role.

There were driving forces participants mentioned that would better assist colleges and universities with increasing resources for CDOs. These forces would create success for the position and help with more equitable change in organizational structure; these driving forces were as follows: (a) legal and political dynamics, (b) changing demographics, (c) rise of a and postindustrial knowledge economy. Institutions have enacted diversity policies, implemented aggressive minority recruitment plans, created multicultural centers, and hired additional staff to program multicultural events for entire campus communities. Participant K described their experiences and their approach to making a case for more resources, in this regard:

> I think the first thing is to understand the culture in which you are leading those efforts; so that's number one—understanding the culture, understanding the institution—then, making

> it clear that I understand what the goals and outcomes of that initiative is or [the] program is. And I tend to use a lot of the logic models, or also there's the backward design. So thinking "what is it that we're trying to do? What is the outcome? What are things if, that is, what are the things that need to happen? What are the resources that need to occur? Who are the people that need to be involved?" And then approaching them with an invitation to support this.

Study participants suggested greater productivity and effectiveness is associated with colleges and universities that employ a properly resourced structure for CDOs. The role of CDO must continually be supported and resourced in new ways—in the present day and in the future. Creating and sustaining resources for CDOs will allow CDOs to influence others.

Resistance on campus toward the CDO position. As higher education institutions continue to grapple with diversity issues and as the appointment of CDOs continues to be seen as a way of addressing those concerns, it will be of growing importance to understand how these administrators execute their responsibilities and how they and other campus leaders understand the possibilities and limitations of this role. From participant interviews, a third theme of resistance on campus toward the CDO position emerged. Participants shared that institutional diversity commitments and planning has fallen on their list of tasks as CDOs and, yet, such efforts have been met constantly with criticism and resistance. From the participants' standpoints, they were their institutions' designated diversity accountability persons. Participant I stated the following related to resistance:

> I think, of all my CDO experiences, we've been able to build capacity, build infrastructure, increase investment and influence in terms of the overall institutional mission, but it was first met with major resistance of campus stakeholders.

The issue of resistance caused stress for CDOs in the present study, which at times, almost led them to leaving their CDO roles from burnout. Participants, many times, felt at a loss in their hopes of building a community with shared values and goals surrounding diversity. Participant A stated how working with others on diversity has jaded some of their outlook about working with other campus community members:

> I think we [hit a] wall. . . . This is tiring work. It's very exhausting. I find that I become more vigilant in my quote "off hours." My family notices it, like I'm on edge more. And I do think it takes a toll on you, and I think that's why we're losing people in the system.

It was important to hear participant A's experience and honesty regarding their work in the CDO role. Participants wanted their fellow administrators to understand the time and energy that CDOs use for leading despite the ambiguous nature of their roles and despite the resistance they face. Ultimately, such resistance impacts the CDOs' work in creating diversity efforts for their campuses.

CDOs in this study shared how they tested their leadership at their institutions. A finding occurred through study interviews that each CDO employed strategies, such as leading strategic diversity planning efforts for a more inclusive community, that were met with resistance from fellow administrators. Participant M described their experience with such resistance:

> I have received push back from executive leadership and cabinet members. This is frustrating, because to truly understand what diversity, equity, and inclusion work means, in the classroom, outside the classroom, in student life, in staff people's lives, and by that I'm talking about facilities, dining catering services, university relations, right? All those areas where the diversity's important but we rarely think about diversity in those places. We need to adapt a model that works for everyone, accounting for their own authenticity.

Study participants shared that they felt they were "the" diversity accountability person at their institution but that there needs to be a challenge to the institution to keep itself accountable beyond the CDO's control. Furthermore, participants believed the following: "There is no accountability for infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion in some departments (such as academic affairs)." The study's CDO participants felt the pressure to make sure diversity was embedded across college settings. Participant M explained this pressure and their experiences with resistance:

> And, at times, [it] can be more challenging than gratifying because so much is about institutions using this role to make themselves look good, to protect themselves, to bring in diversity but not provide the type of support that diverse representations require in order to be successful, be that students, faculty, or staff.

Participant M stated institutions should use their institutional power to influence units to keep themselves accountable for the vision set forth by CDOs. This could only build a better environment or climate for each unit, and it would ease the resistance met by CDOs. Participant C also brought up an interesting point regarding utilizing institutional power from college and university presidents in facing resistance. Participant C shared the following:

> I think I just learned how to play the game. I think in the beginning . . . I came out of admissions, and then I was put positionally in this role with somewhat power but with the backing of the president, so I started to deal with more of the heavy hitters on campus. I was doing a lot more with VPs on campus, so just learning the game. I think for me that's what I had to adjust in my leadership in dealing with their resistance.

It was intriguing to hear Participant C's description of "playing the game." It was as if Participant C perceived working in higher education as a competition among administrators. Other participants mentioned similar battles they had encountered in doing diversity work in higher education.

CDOs go through a back-and-forth process moving diversity work forward with fears of being solely responsible for institutional diversity efforts and fears that other institutional members will continue to resist their diversity efforts. In moments of resistance, CDOs encounter issues with institutional power and often must navigate competing expectations from various institutional units. Study participants shared that certain institutional units have been criticized from both opponents and proponents of diversity efforts, accused of being too aggressive by the former and of not being aggressive enough by the latter.

Another form of resistance that challenged the study participants at times was "microaggressions." This is a term that means an individual who often unconsciously articulates a prejudiced approach toward a member of a marginalized group (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Participants had either encountered these forms of attacks or had worked a lot on their campuses to help counter these attacks among students, administration, staff, and faculty. The psychological, social, and academic damages that stem from encounters with microaggressions occur, in large part, because targets of microaggressions interpret these verbal offenses initially as being tied to their personality, attitude, or behavior; however, on further reflection, targets may view the assault as based on race and realize that there is nothing that they can do about their race. Participant D reported the following related to resistance and microaggressions:

> Being a woman of color and the youngest around the senior leadership table, I'm oftentimes questioned about my expertise, oftentimes overlooked by the president, by the provost, by everybody because there may be an equity-focused issue that happens, and, doggone it, that's my job, but, sometimes, the president may go to someone else that he can trust or whatever, and so I have to deal with that issue of having to come back and tell him actually, that's my job.

Another participant, Participant F, mentioned their salient identity as being a CDO of color and reported on how microaggressions challenged the work they do at their institution; yet, Participant F utilized the resistance they received and created an opportunity to strengthen their identity as a CDO. In that regard, Participant F stated the following:

> As a woman of color, I was receiving a lot of microaggressions on a daily basis. I decided to not personalize those, but just make note of it, and actually use it toward my advantage to be able to use it as curriculum development to develop workshops.

Participant F believed the challenges from resistance could be transformed into opportunities for bringing more people together rather than creating division among colleagues or even students in certain situations around campus.

Personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position. The academic and intellectual benefits of having a diverse campus community include development of personal characteristics and engagement with different perspectives as critical to learning. Participants in this study agreed that their personal characteristics were important to their positions as CDOs. This became the last theme that emerged from interview analysis, and this theme also addressed the last research question. The study participants' characteristics transformed through their life experiences, which ranged from their childhood, to their college years as a student, to other personal and professional experiences. Having been exposed to different situations in their lives assisted them in leading through the ambiguity of being in a CDO position. Study participants shared that personal responsibility and a positive mindset for diversity and inclusion were personal characteristics that facilitated success for them in their positions. Leading diversity efforts at higher education institutions is about appreciating and valuing differences in respective campus communities, according to participant interviews.

Study participants shared about being a responsible person and, along with that characteristic, also having conviction in doing diversity work. Participant H revealed what being responsible had meant to successful development in their position:

> I think sometimes this work can be discouraging when individuals feel like they are shouldering all the responsibility independently and that they're the sole person who's trying to advance the diversity and inclusion campaign across the university system. So, I'm grateful that we have come up with programming distinct ways to garner support from some of our community across our university system.

Participant G also described their personal characteristics as facilitating their success: "I found strength in responsibility, the ability to respond, with authority. And I like to think about those two words: 'responsibility' the ability to respond, and 'authority,' . . . and in the word 'authority' is the word 'author,' to have authorship." Participant G's statement suggests leading with responsibility has ensured a sense of control in their leadership without doubting their power because of external forces. Participant B similarly explained their experience with personal characteristics of responsibility:

> I want to control everything. And so [I had] to learn how to slow it down a little bit, invite other people into the conversation, that is. And then also another thing is, really . . . I think I can also say I'm a relational leader. So, my responsibility, in terms of facilitating success in my position, comes through building relationships.

Many of the participants in the present study found that "having a balance of sharing my own perspective and understanding others'" was a meaningful statement regarding the theme of personal characteristics. Diverse life experiences impacted the study participants' personal characteristics, which informed how they operated among a multitude of people at colleges and universities. For example, Participant N touched on their experiences and how it was vital for them

to receive early messages about diversity and inclusion; in part, these messages informed the work that they did for their institution. Participant N related the following:

> And so, I think from that point in time up until present day, I have lived to really create diverse experiences for people. I have an array of friends, being from all over different parts of the world, and I'm not ashamed or afraid to connect with people, and I'm not afraid to connect people with other people. And so that's kind of how I see diversity and inclusion in the work that I do; [it's] making sure that people understand and recognize different cultures and connect with them in meaningful and impactful ways.

Participants suggested taking note of how much diversity is embedded in our lives, which was described by Participant N and their formed personal characteristic of a positive mindset for diversity and inclusion. I perceived this participant as a natural fit for the CDO position given this personal characteristic, which Participant N described as creating a seamless transition to the CDO position for them.

From participant interviews, I found that working for institutions with organizational structures encompassing greater diversity (having a greater collection of diverse thoughts and ideas) would benefit students' mindsets in transforming viewpoints. Study participants found diverse mindsets to be important for challenging stakeholders at colleges and universities not only to change compositional diversity, which creates opportunities for inclusion, but also to increase success for CDOs. Participant N shared more on how their personal characteristics facilitated success:

> So it's not without offense, but it is with empathy that I navigate these waters of implementing and leading our diversity efforts, because I know it's a difficult conversation. . . . And so it is sort of a gaming strategy of reading the room, and understanding the information that you have to convey, and doing that with empathy and understanding, and

> helping people recognize and understand my heart in this work—and the heart of the institution—as we continue to grow.

Participant N deftly described the importance of utilizing their personal characteristics to produce future actions in diversity work for sustainable efforts.

All of the participants mentioned that using their personal characteristics transformed how they lead and transformed how they reached out to include many people as well as to expose those same stakeholders to diversity work. Participant L shared their deep experiences with this theme of personal characteristics and transformation:

> I think that was my beginning of advancing balance work and [of] transition[ing] toward being a diversity officer. As I continued my higher education experience, I gained more responsibility and deepened my mindset from overseeing their multicultural student services division and counsel with their student vice president for minority student affairs. So my portfolio continued to expand.

Participant L saw the need to incorporate a diverse and inclusive mindset characteristic in their work, which informed them how to advance diversity work in different areas in college settings. Participants shared that such personal responsibility was important for working to increase the quality of implemented structures, practices, and processes of diversity work at institutions. Participant L also shared profound thoughts on their experiences with inclusive excellence, which impacted their leading from experience:

> I have an inclusive philosophy as it relates to leadership. I think that we must focus [on] equity in all that we do. So, I don't use a silo or a specific approach as it relates to how we prioritize their work, but rather position it in all that we do. So, whether we're talking about our review of finance as an institution and as an organization, or whether we're thinking

about access to technology, I think we have to position equity and outcomes at the center of those discussions.

Participants in this study believed what they brought to institutions were collaborative attributes to include more people in diversity work. They also mentioned such attributes would produce more equity in diversity and, from that standpoint, create more successful inclusion throughout campus environments.

Chapter 4 Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the experiences of CDOs with leading despite the ambiguity of the organizational structure of their roles. This chapter presented the findings of the present study and revealed four key themes relevant to CDOs holding these roles in higher education at different levels (i.e., 2-year institutions, 4-year, public, private, etc.). A provided summary of each theme revealed in the CDOs' descriptions of leading through the phenomenon and expounded upon the concepts that were revealed by the data, using statements from each CDO to give a more accurate sense of their lived experiences.

The analysis of data gained from the participant interviews answered the research question and subquestions, including the overarching research question: How do higher education CDOs describe their experiences with organizational structure role ambiguity? The meaningful experiences most commonly cited by the CDOs included ambiguity in the CDO position, resources necessary for success in the CDO position, resistance on campus toward the CDO position, and personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position. Participants attributed the meaningful experiences to ambiguity, which suggests the need for more clearly defined CDO positions from institutions. Participants cited the meaningful experiences of leading despite the ambiguity as instrumental in their leadership engagement at their institutions.

The CDO participants also answered the first subquestion: How do CDOs describe ambiguity in the organizational structure of their roles? All participants described it as a process without a template in place. The second subquestion was as follows: How do CDOs enact the requirements of their positions while working within ambiguous organizational structures? Most of the participants believed in making necessary adjustments in working with people and in building relationships. The third subquestion, which was also answered by the CDOs, was as follows: What professional and personal characteristics help CDOs work within ambiguous organizational structures? Most of the participants shared about connections through listening, learning, having patience, and finding support. Chapter 4 detailed the strategies used by the CDO participants in becoming successful in leading through ambiguity in their roles.

By answering the research questions, the CDOs provided insight on the phenomenon of their lived experiences in higher education, which included a detailed description of the phenomenon as they encountered it. The results presented in this chapter derived from a phenomenological approach that included interviewing 14 participants using electronic video conferencing software or digitally recorded phone calls. Through the coding and analyzing of the interview transcripts, four themes were founded. These findings drive the conclusions that was discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

In this chapter, results, limitations, implications, and recommendations based on the phenomenological analysis of the experiences of CDOs in higher education, who lead through ambiguity in their roles are discussed. In Chapter 4, reported results were displayed on this study; Chapter 5 includes a discussion of those results, how the results relate to literature, limitations, implications of the results, recommendations for further research, and conclusions.

An interpretation of the study's results was showcased, and shared insights were giving to make connections to the community of practice. A Discussion on how the findings of this study inform the literature on the subject and how these findings may benefit stakeholders at colleges and universities and, most importantly, other CDOs was shared. Additionally, a discussion on limitations of the research design and how revising the study's methods could improve future research on the subject. Last, an evaluation on the research questions and how they align with the purpose of the study took place.

Summary of the Results

The main question of the present research study was as follows: How do higher education CDOs describe their experiences with ambiguity in the organizational structure of their roles? "Ambiguity," for the purposes of the study and main research question, related to a CDO's experience with an ill-defined organizational structure governing their role. There were three additional research questions for this study:

- How do CDOs describe ambiguity in the organizational structure of their roles?
- How do CDOs enact the requirements of their positions while working within ambiguous organizational structures?

- What professional and personal characteristics help CDOs work within ambiguous organizational structures?

Main research question and subquestions were answered by interviewing study participants through WebEx video and Rev.com phone conferencing. Other studies that focused on CDOs leading in higher education informed the present study, as discussed below.

According to Nixon (2017), senior-level diversity administrator or CDO organizational structure differs from higher education institution to higher education institution. In addition, Leon (2014) noted that poorly structured CDO positions continue to create barriers at many higher education institutions; therefore, participants were purposefully selected so that each person in their role would best represent and contribute to the phenomenon being studied (Wilson, 2013).

Significance of the study. As a higher education professional, connections were made with CDOs in different settings (i.e., conferences, events, trainings, etc.) focused on diversity in higher education. The professional aspiration is to be a CDO, but engaging with CDOs, something in the stories they shared was noticed. These stories were cautionary tales, and hearing the stories ignited the interest to know more about the lived experiences of CDOs. As addressed in the present study, the phenomenon of the CDO role is leading despite ambiguity in organizational structure.

The CDO role is still growing, and disagreements still exist among experts in terms of what qualities and organizational structure make for an ideal CDO role (NADOHE, 2014; Worthington et al., 2014). An observation was made, from many cases in which CDOs neither felt valued on their own campuses nor understood where to focus their leadership efforts; however, the importance of the CDO role should be regarded from all levels and should have evident benefits to all campus community and external community members (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012). Themes identified in the present study could better equip stakeholders at colleges and universities to understand what CDOs' encounter and the need for CDOs to be successful for institutional

betterment. Ultimately, an improved understanding of what a CDO experiences informs diversity goals, addresses campus issues of diversity, and extends the leader's ability to realize campus climate change, adding to the limited research on the role of CDOs and informing higher education institutions and policy makers.

Theory. Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) created a framework focused on foundational concepts for the organizational design and structure of CDO roles; they claimed the role structure should follow from the big-picture diversity goals of an institution and from its strategic diversity plan. Their CDODF uses approaches of collaboration, function, and area collection to provide a clear organizational structure for the role of CDO. While theory, in general, does not always provide tangible policies or solutions, Williams and Wade-Golden's development framework for CDOs has real-world institutional implications for those who study CDOs and diversity work efforts. Other research has been conducted and shared to gain knowledge for role sustainability for CDOs. Williams and Wade-Golden's work is still a point of contention regarding the best way to utilize CDOs' roles in higher education. The point of contention results in the ambiguity of the organizational structure in the CDO position.

Themes. After analyzing data from the participant interviews, four themes were identified. The themes that resulted from the participant interviews were related directly to the research questions (see Summary of the Results). The themes that emerged from the investigation of the phenomenon were as follows:

1. Ambiguity in the CDO position,
2. Resources necessary for success in the CDO position,
3. Resistance on campus toward the CDO, and;
4. Personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position.

All these themes defined the phenomenon of the study: the participants leading through ambiguity in their roles as CDOs. The nuances of each theme are explained in Discussion of the Results.

Discussion of the Results

The following section summarizes the results of the present study, using qualitative data to answer the research question and subquestions. There were 14 interviews with participants from different types of higher education institutions (i.e., 4-year, 2-year, private, public). Data from the 14 interviews were analyzed, identifying codes in the data from which themes emerged that provided insight and helped answer the research questions. The four themes and research questions are discussed below.

Ambiguity in the CDO position. All 14 of the study participants suggested there were no templates for being in their roles as CDOs and for them to operate within organizational structures. Stakeholders at colleges and universities, however, could use the work of Williams and Wade-Golden (2013). They can use the CDODF, to create a clear structure for the CDO role to positively impact their institutional needs and, most importantly, to positively impact the CDO hired to take on the role. For example, extra work and stress often develops from hiring someone to take on the role of CDO without a clear path for operating in the position, as described by the present study's Participant D:

> It felt undefined, un-planned-for. It felt like crafting something that no one had really took into consideration what it should really consist of. It felt like trying to meet 100 different expectations from so many different people in our community.

Higher education administrators committed to having a CDO role need to understand the importance of setting up the people they hire for success and not leaving them in space of working in ambiguity. When a college or university explicitly elects to hire a CDO and to develop this new

position, it is vital to proceed with care in forming the position and in finding a formidable candidate (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008).

Crafting and supporting the role of CDO usually starts with the institution's top administrator, the institution's president. Not all the participants in the present study directly reported to the president or were on their president's cabinet; all 14 CDO study participants agreed it was difficult to do their job effectively given this constraint. All the study participants suggested that opportunities for collaborating with the president and having a place on their cabinet were ambiguous in nature. Their reasons for seeking such collaboration and such a cabinet position included the need for clarity in vision and clarity in responsibilities regarding how they should carry out tasks for their campuses. These results are supported by Leon (2014), who found that having a direct reporting relationship to the president strengthened the role of CDOs and the work that the role was responsible for at an institution. Lacking this relationship, present study participants described having to create their own strength for the position. Participant E explained their resiliency in not having a template formed by administration:

> I walked in basically to an empty office, an empty desk, no records, and no documents, no one who had been in the role previously. No real track record to say, "Okay, continue this work, we'll start this, we'll stop this, we'll deepen this area. It was really, "Okay, here's a blank page, write it." That was both exciting and daunting at the same time.

Clearly, it is difficult to understand how to operate in a new environment without having context and previous institutional knowledge. Working in concert with college and university presidents would create the change needed to dissolve organizational structure ambiguity for CDOs. According to Wilson (2013), CDOs should be directly reporting to the position with the most power at institutions; the CDO should be able to efficiently pursue diversity policy and change efforts without going through a lot of campus bureaucracy.

If the ambiguity continues, creating challenges for CDOs, then campus growth in diversity will cease. This would be counter cultural given the trajectory of campuses becoming more diverse. Reports suggest that by 2050, the U.S. population will only be comprised 50% of Whites (Perez, 2013). Perez also mentioned that stakeholders at colleges and universities need to consider an institutional commitment to supporting diversity. This is important because it suggests that campuses may not have appropriately attended to tailoring the organizational structure of the CDO role. Not opting for creating a clear vision for a CDO position may lead to an ill-fitted organizational structure that does not attend to the core needs of the campus.

Resources necessary for success in the CDO position. All 14 study participants agreed that CDOs need to be well-resourced to be successful in their roles. Each CDO in the study experienced different levels of resource access. According to the current study, a key focus for CDOs and for institutions creating CDO roles is to recognize the tangible and intangible resources that are vital for organizational structure Tangible resources include budget and human capital. Intangible resources include presidential commitment and relationships with other stakeholders. Understanding and awareness of resource needs would facilitate the ability of a CDO to leverage their resources effectively.

Different reporting structures impacted the study's CDOs regarding resource use. These structures included overseeing units under the role of CDO or having no units to supervise. All 14 of the study participants suggested that once a CDO is resourced, successful results would follow within their respective colleges and universities; having the resources available would counter ambiguity in their CDO role. Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) described more specific potential positive results of a well-resourced CDO position: raised levels of visibility for the institution's diversity efforts; goals and measures progress; more readily available expertise on issues of access, equity, diversity, and inclusion; and increased numbers and improved success of students, faculty,

and staff members from underrepresented groups through created initiatives, collaborative relationships, and implemented national effective practices.

Many of the study participants viewed collaboration as a valued resource in their CDO roles. Collaboration, to study participants, meant being able to supervise a staff to better assist diversity efforts or being a one-person office while reaching out to other areas on campus to forward diversity initiatives and change campus culture. Collaboration is vital to higher education CDOs in reaching out and building new ways to sustain change among campus communities and external stakeholders (Wilson, 2013). Not having access to collaboration as a resource can stall a CDO's success. Participant M explained their view on collaboration as a necessary resource:

> The CDO role is an interesting role because most institutions don't even know what the hell it means. My first year as a CDO, it was a lot of work. It was time consuming, that comes to mind. It was gratifying at some level in terms of folks reaching out and asking your thoughts on different issues pertaining to diversity, equity, and inclusion, but it was also, dissatisfying in some way. It requires so much of you. As a CDO, if you don't have the resources and the capacity and the cultural capital to influence then it could just be a constant uphill battle.

As Participant M related, administrators need to understand the time and energy that CDOs use for leading despite the ambiguous nature of their roles. Especially when CDOs operate without proper staffing, it is important for other campus leaders to be allies and/or advocates in committed diversity efforts. As Leon (2014, p. 83) noted, "Leaders need access to these networks (key players), to enact change, bring ideas, discuss projects, and assure that diversity has a voice at the table." Such advocacy would help with the resource challenges of CDOs.

Resistance on campus toward the CDO position. All of the study participants reported that they were in the only position accountable for diversity at their institutions, which they

realized when experiencing resistance from their campus communities; however, participants all agreed that diversity efforts should be an institutional commitment and a shared responsibility throughout senior-level administration. All participants felt the pressure to make sure diversity was intertwined across their campus environments. More specifically, without a concise structure to keep the institution accountable with diversity, the study participants felt the need to solely lead those efforts. A meaningful statement (see Appendix B) that resonated for most all the study participants was the following: "There is no accountability of infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion in some departments (such as academic affairs)."

College stakeholders must make it a point to plan diversity efforts within each department without having a CDO forcing it within a department's strategic plan. Being more aware of an institution's diversity work needs is an element that can be assessed by the entire institution and not just one position. A CDO could be brought in as a consultant to departments or to train key personnel to be consultants in departmental units. This would create a collaborative model and placing diversity efforts as an institutional approach versus one-position focusing on diversity work. There are benefits of this approach to diversity efforts that will greatly impact each campus environment. One benefit is the opportunity of having campus society mirror current society; this stance is connected to compositional diversity, but another benefit is learning the importance of diversity with the intent of enriching students' individual lives. Educating students about diversity is critical as stakeholders at colleges and universities equip them for their unique professional positions and civic duties after graduation (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012). As CDOs educate the campus on critical issues, there is an issue that has impacted the participants in a resistant manner: microaggressions.

A meaningful statement that nine out of 14 study participants supported regarded a form of resistance linked to microaggressions impacting much of their work. These study participants had

either received microaggressions or had spent a lot of time facilitating trainings or conducting investigations about microaggressions. Participants had encountered these forms of attacks or helped to counter these attacks among students, administration, staff, and faculty. The study participants' descriptions suggested that microaggression resistance commonly focused on their racial and ethnic identities.

In this study and in the work of the CDO participants, identity was tied to diversity and inclusion efforts. Resisting CDOs' work impacted their identities, a challenge commonly committed by participants' White peers. In general, microaggressions are so rampant that people often dismiss them as innocent comments or communication errors, rather than recognizing them as an attribute of White supremacy, White privilege, or racist attitudes (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008); however, interpretation of the study participants' descriptions showed that the participants' credentials and credibility as competent administrators were routinely challenged or invalidated through such microaggressions. This form of resistance had taken a mental and physical toll on study participants' well-being, and the participants utilized self-care activities to maintain their well-being facing this form of resistance from campus members.

It is also important to note that though the role of a CDO involves different ways of engaging the campus and educating people on history and current affairs, it may be perceived as shaming to other people. Thirteen out of 14 participants suggested countering the emerged theme of such resistance involves spreading the message that diversity work is not about shaming people.

Personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position. All the study participants suggested that personal characteristics facilitated their success in their CDO roles. Study participants stated that being responsible is a personal characteristic that has given them strength to embrace issues, which created successful experiences in their roles. Valuing responsibility had, indeed, created space for participants to navigate improbable situations at their

institutions. All participants advised that having a positive mindset and authentically caring for diversity and inclusion were additional characteristics that produced success in their roles. Finally, participant success also came from family backgrounds and personal college student experiences that formed their personal characteristics.

Nine of the 14 study participants suggested the need for balancing their own perspectives while respecting and understanding other perspectives; to the participants, reaching out to and understanding many people was important in building an inclusive environment for their campuses. All participants were eager to point out that having a positive diversity and inclusion mindset assisted in how they were able to lead such campus community growth. Scholars have asserted that the meaning of "diversity" is unclear and varies across higher education institutions (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Williams & Clowney, 2007). "Inclusion" is another unclear term across institutions of higher education. Diversity and equity consultants have offered a phrase that illustrates the meaning of both terms: "Diversity is being invited to the party – inclusion is being asked to dance" (Indigogod, 2014). Each participant's institution enunciated and underlined the notion of inclusion separately from the concept of diversity. All participants described their own positive mindset of diversity as representing their commitment to their institutions. They described inclusion as being equitable to all and ensuring that all campus members have access to educational learning opportunities, bringing more people together for the betterment of their campuses. Leading diversity efforts at higher education institutions is about appreciating and valuing differences in respective campus communities, which was key to the participants' personal characteristics.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

CDOs represent a current evolution of diversity-focused strategic planning on college and university campuses, advancing recruitment and retention issues and addressing curriculum,

climate, and policymaking (Nixon, 2017). Critical to the continued growth of CDOs and diversity efforts is the exploration of how CDOs lead in their positions despite ambiguity in their position's organizational structure. In this section, the present study's findings in relation to the literature on this subject was discussed. The literature review in Chapter 2 examined current literature that justified conducting the present study's research. Understanding the different factors that impact the work of CDOs, such as ambiguity, extends the current literature and situates examining CDO leadership despite role ambiguity as a priority at educational institutions. In addition to "ambiguity," three other emerged themes were articulated by the 14 participants of this study; all of the participants' perspectives identified how they have led despite the ambiguity in their CDO position and contributed to the evolution of the literature on this subject.

Ambiguity in the CDO position. Leon (2014) found that poorly constructed CDO roles hinder the accomplishment of CDO tasks. CDO role ambiguity hindering task accomplishment was mentioned many times during the present study's CDO participant interviews. Participants stated their position of CDO was undefined and unclear; there was no template to the role for these leaders stepping onto college and university campuses. Parker (2015) found that blurred lines around CDO positions impacts structure for people in the CDO roles. This concept of blurred lines or unclearness was evident in the reviewed literature as well as in the frustrations shared by the present study's participants. According to Perez (2013), institutions need to not only focus on creating a critical mass within leadership, faculty, staff, and student bodies of institutions but also form clear structures linked to supporting diversity efforts. There was a resounding agreement among the present study's participants about changing this narrative of CDO role ambiguity.

Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) found that power and authority, at times are not given to CDOs. Similarly, Wilson (2013) found that the CDO role is increasing within higher education but that there has been ambiguity regarding the position's organizational structure and authority.

The present study's participants discussed this vagueness in terms of how much influence they had on their campuses. During the present study's interviews, participants mentioned that having a role on the campus was a starting place but placing power and support would transform the position into one that could create positive change. This meaningful statement from participants can be linked to Perez (2013), who related that stakeholders at colleges and universities have focused on inclusion on their campuses and on growth in student experience, but, typically, no real change in diversity has occurred over time. People in CDO positions, in the words of the present study's participants, need to be viewed in the same vein as any other senior-level administrator on campus with the same respect and structure allowances and affordances. Complementing the study participants' conclusions, Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) found that the role of a CDO should not be approached singularly but as a collaborative position resourcing diversity efforts. Indeed, all the present study's participants mentioned the need to have a clear vision for the role and to collaborate in the development and implementation of diversity work on campuses.

Resources necessary for success in the CDO position. Setting up CDOs with proper resources would create space for role success, as evidenced in the present study's results and in the literature. Williams and Clowney (2007) found that colleges and universities' stakeholders had the ability to provide resources to bring about change in concert with their CDOs. Similarly, all the participants in the present study noted that being well-resourced was a necessity for any CDO in higher education. Furthermore, study participants agreed that carrying a title like vice-president of diversity or something to that nature—plus infrastructure and financial resources—would impact how useful the CDO could be for an institution. According to Worthington et al. (2014), expanding institutional power representation for CDOs is vital in transforming the campus and curriculum.

In this regard, the present study's participants shared their experiences with power and networks and how doing the work of a *networked* CDO erased the stress that has traditionally

haunted the position. Wilson (2013) found that networked collaboration was vital to CDOs in reaching and building sustainable ways of developing change among a campus community. All the participants of the present study agreed with Wilson and insisted that they could not do their work alone; being able outreach and collaborate with other administrators and institutional units was a way for the study participants to succeed. Bolman and Deal (2017) found that such long-term relationships create an opportunity for CDOs to affect systemic change on campuses. It was important to the participants of the present study to be employed at institutions that showed a level of care regarding the work that CDOs.

Williams and Wade-Golden (2013) found that the CDODF builds a foundation that will assist institutions and the people they hire in creating meaningful structure for their CDOs. Most of the participants in the present study mentioned the CDODF as a helpful framework and a resource that had impacted their diversity goals and strategic planning within their respective institutions. From listening to the participants, the framework created an opening for empathetic coalition building to advance diversity efforts was learned. Making strategic moves in decision-making produced resource opportunities to make progress in the organizational structure of their position.

Resistance on campus toward CDO position. Nussbaum and Chang (2013) found that tension from making a commitment to diversity affects CDO goals for institutional transformation. This tension is a part of the resistance CDOs' face in their roles. For example, participants in the present study insisted that they were responsible for leading diversity efforts, but, when they enacted this leadership, they encountered critics doubting their purpose on campus. This suggests that there was not much of a shared perspective between CDOs and other campus members. According to Harvey (2014), new perspectives create productive change; many CDOs in the study agreed that having a balance of sharing their own perspective and understanding others was important. In the literature and among the present study's participants, ill-fitted commitments to

understanding one another's perspective has created resistance to CDOs navigating within campus department areas.

Yet, Paredes-Collins (2009) found that stakeholders at colleges and universities *should* be accountable for creating awareness for diversity and should empower their members for inclusive comprehension. The participants in the present study shared the challenges they faced in reaching this goal of educating their campus communities on the need to share the responsibility and accountability of diversity efforts. Most of the participants insisted that infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion among their institution's departments, such as academic affairs, was met with resistance. The participants added that it is an uphill battle with academic affairs, specifically, is a challenge of resistance regarding the role of CDO that can cause burnout for people in the position. Wilson (2013) found that the burden has fallen severely on CDOs to blaze the trail for institutional change. Longman (2017), too, found that CDOs are preventing or solving crises and putting too much work on themselves and not holding their institutions accountable. As a complication to the literature, participants in the present study discussed they did not desire to be a "diversity savior" and that they intentionally sought out relationship as an act of resilience in the face of resistance from others.

Personal characteristics that facilitate success in the CDO position. According to Williams and Wade-Golden (2007), CDOs count on their personality, charm, ability, and critical thinking to create cross-connecting associations aiding the execution of tasks on their campuses. Further, Stanley (2014) labeled "identity" as a significant aspect of a CDO role—including values, beliefs, experiences, privileges, biases, interactions with people, and views of academia, higher education, society, and the world. Expanding the literature, participants in the present study noted that personal, diverse experiences and characteristics have helped them with leading in their roles as CDOs. Participants shared how they had to adapt or flex their leadership styles to overcome

some difficult moments in their leadership as a CDO and that their leadership styles were connected to their personal characteristics. One of characteristics that resonated most with the participants were their mindsets. Participants agreed that an open-mind mindset regarding diversity and inclusion was a productive frame of reference that had guided the participants to success in their positions.

Limitations

There were some limitations to the present study, primarily because it involved participants who provided personal and professional experiences that were directly linked to their current professional roles as CDOs. The first limitation of this study was a lack of time to continue to build trust with the participants. The participants displayed sensitivity in the initial phase of research recruitment. As part of the interview process, current CDOs was asked to tell their truth in describing their experiences and that placed the participants in a precarious space with a person they knew little more than a few professional details about. In addition to the pairing of a sensitive topic shared with a little-known observer, participants were volunteering time from an already demanding work schedule. The interviews took place during May to June which, for administrators (including CDOs), means focusing on end-of-year reporting and taking much needed time to decompress from a grueling academic year. Despite these limitations, I, as the researcher, tried to make sure that trust was given explicit importance in this study in which participants detailed their experiences with the phenomenon. As the researcher, it was important to display deep listening to overcome the listed limitations.

The second limitation was having the "right" number of interviews for the study. Creswell (2007) suggested that to better understand a phenomenon by examining lived experiences, a researcher should interview between 5–25 participants. For the present study, a plan was to obtain 10–12 participants; then, through the recruiting process, scheduled interviews with 16 CDOs took

place. The final number of interviews included 14 participants. This limitation posed a problem in the data collection process, specifically. Securing 14 interviews required extensive follow-up communications to make sure they were properly executed and concluded.

The third limitation was the interview style. According to Seidman (2013), model phenomenological interviewing involves three single interviews with each participant. Conducting three separate interviews with participants could have allowed time for additional trust-building trust and reflection (limitation one). If I had utilized this interview style, then a smaller number of participants would have been appropriate (limitation two). Given time constraints, the present study's results are based on a single, detailed interview with each participant. This interview style still provided meaningful data, despite the mentioned limitations, given that the interview questions were open-ended, which provided opportunities for participants to share rich descriptions of the phenomenon. As the researcher, the usage of deep listening helped to understand the experiences through the single interview and was able to interpret the participant's words while gaining a sense of meaning from the interviews.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

The present study's data provided insight into how CDOs lead despite ambiguity in the organizational structure of their positions. A primary result of the study suggests that stakeholders may want to acquire additional information regarding the phenomenon given the revealed frustrations among CDOs in higher education. Ultimately, the study provided an understanding of the phenomenon of leading through ambiguity for CDOs and identified professional struggles that impact their leadership.

Implications for practice. The first implication for practice is that the present study provides data about CDOs and the ambiguity they face in their roles. Stakeholders at colleges and universities may benefit from this information as they consider strategic methods for creating and

supporting a CDO position. Similarly, institutional presidents may find the research beneficial when making decisions regarding resourcing the CDO role. The study results suggest that resources could be used for creating a template or succession plan for incumbent CDOs, a clear vision for the position, and continuous visible support from college and university president and board of trustees.

The results of the present study could be used to begin a conversation among college and university administrators on establishing and developing succession plans for CDOs in higher education. Intentionally framing CDO positions in this way would eliminate or alleviate the perception that CDO roles are slated with vague campus objectives and are not well understood within higher education circles (Banerji, 2005; Gose, 2006). The participants in the present study mentioned that a lack of support from institutions created stress and burnout in the role; having a succession plan for the role, rather, would set a foundation and framework for CDOs to be effective. A succession plan would address the need for a template for the CDO position that participants mentioned. Such a plan would establish a higher chance of success in the traditionally ambiguous role of CDO.

Providing a clear vision for not only diversity efforts but also for CDOs would benefit stakeholders at colleges and universities. Present study results suggest this vision should be a two-part process: first, institutions create the role, and, second, the hired CDO collaborates with the campus. According to Williams and Wade-Golden (2007), it is important that CDOs advance a collective vision for diversity on a campus, and such work requires authenticity and commitment with all campus community members. This vision-casting should focus on policy making for diversity, on infrastructural issues, on addressing academic issues, and on campus support programs. Present study results imply that a sense of inclusive excellence would be achievable from an informed vision for the CDO position.

Present study participants clearly indicated that continuous visible support from college and university presidents and boards of trustees is vital to the CDO role. Once boards of trustees and their institutional presidents afford their college or university a comprehensive understanding of campus culture, they can garner support to multiple roles within the campus landscape (Arnold & Kowalski-Braun, 2012). More specifically, sending messages to internal and external members connected to respective institutions could create systemic change for the position of CDO.

Implications for policy. Developing and applying new policies, initiatives, and programs within college environments can be a difficult venture. Policymaking impacts many campus units and offices in unique ways. These ways may be positive or negative, and, yet, evaluating the impact is paramount to staying current with change in a campus culture. It is beneficial to review policy before any change in practice is made. For example, CDOs have the strategic vision to conceptualize their work in advancing diversity, inclusion, and equity, while simultaneously having the administrative expertise to be responsive to the broader contextual landscape around policy (Worthington et al., 2014).

Present study results imply that the formation of CDO positions at stakeholders at colleges and universities needs to be examined. The formation of the role of CDO proved to be a point of contention for study participants. Participants agreed that institutions in need of leadership in diversity efforts are at a deficit in current shifts in culture in the U.S. Higher education system has prided itself as a place for intellectual growth spaces for people occupying the environment; however, if stakeholders at colleges and universities are setting the stage for students moving toward the "real world," then institutions need to support the diversity that is a part of the society. In this way, CDOs are the agents of change in society. This view tends to suggest that CDOs need to be leaders who are capable at framing issues, building coalitions, and establishing a climate where group members can seek a common solution (Wilson, 2013).

Students, staff, and faculty members of colleges and universities need to cease in resisting CDOs. Participants in the present study confirmed that they met much criticism in their positions of CDOs. The existing literature only begins to consider solutions. According to Wilson (2013), CDOs can turn challenging situations into opportunities for healing through outreach and collaborative relationships. Yet present study results suggest there is an element of fear in having someone in a leadership position raising concerns about diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. A CDO needs to make sure that many parts of an institution move forward with societal progress. If intercultural competence, humility, and sensitivity were tied to institutional policies, then it would better assist the CDO position. Study participants mentioned throughout interviews that it is a difficult dynamic to build trust and relationships with individuals. There is a need for creating polices that ease the resistance from ignorance toward CDOs; policies could be enacted to bring parties together.

Implications for theory. The purpose of the present study was inquiry into the organizational structure ambiguity within the CDO position. Many theories within the literature pointed to a lack of institutional vision, lack of resources, critical role justification, and lack of utilizing frameworks, and poor support systems as causes of position ambiguity for CDOs. The present study participants' responses complemented these theories and provided additional, specific examples of the obstacles that CDOs encounter as a part of higher education administrations. The participants in the study revealed important data that serves as further evidence that CDOs encounter much ambiguity in their roles; ultimately, study results imply that the problem of organizational structure ambiguity for CDOs could be answered with theories that consider more structure and support to advance the role.

The present study results support the research of Williams and Wade-Golden (2013), who found that CDOs are essential to higher education diversity work. The study participants also

supported the research of Wilson (2013), who found that CDOs influence institutions by elevating the visibility and credibility of campus diversity and strategic planning efforts. Nixon (2017) also argued that a strong agency orientation, a high self-efficacy that increases resilience in the face of resistance, and the capacity to view obstacles as opportunities impact the work of CDOs. CDOs in the present study confirmed that these elements are ways that CDOs lead despite ambiguity.

Discoveries from this study show the importance of linking theory with practice and policy. Studies of this type need to be further explored by detailing more experiences from CDOs.

Recommendations for Further Research

While previous studies have examined various aspects of the CDO role, there was a research gap, a need to explore the lived experiences of CDOs working through the phenomenon of the role's ambiguity. Previous studies focused on the CDO framework but did not specifically target stories specifically illuminating the role's ambiguity. The present study's results can be used to help identify concrete ways for institutions, current CDOs, and aspiring CDOs to productively navigate diversity, equity, and inclusion work within higher education. This research also contributes to my professional development as a researcher and educator who predominately works in diversity, equity, and inclusion and who aspires to be a higher education CDO. The following are recommendations for future research, in that regard.

The first recommendation would be to replicate and expand the number of studies of this kind throughout the U.S. Most of the studies should be qualitative, modeling the methods of the present study, but mixed methods could also be beneficial to display a variety of research. Within the literature, it shows there is an ambiguity issue across institutions in the U.S.; much valuable information can be gained from identifying and investigating specific trends, programs, and regions regarding the CDO position. New studies would offer future researchers' new data and keep this subject at the forefront of higher educational research.

The second recommendation would be to examine CDO mentoring programs, which directly connect with presidential mentoring, peer mentoring among vice-presidents/deans, and network mentoring from organizations like NADOHE. Mentoring for current CDOs or even aspiring CDOs is crucial in improving on providing resources to CDO. The focus of the research should be mentoring programs for CDOs, but even created professional pipelines for aspiring CDOs could be within the research. Examining these programs at 2-year and 4-year institutions could provide important information that continues to build and transform foundations for CDOs.

The third recommendation would be to examine former CDOs' lived experiences with the organizational structure role ambiguity. This study would provide needed data on ascension to the role, maintenance in the role, barriers faced in the role, and past and future outlooks on the position. While most studies focus on information from current CDOs, this study could focus on experiences from people who worked as a CDO.

Conclusion

The results of this study provide insight into the experiences of CDOs leading despite the ambiguity of the organizational structure of their roles. The 14 participants in this study gave descriptive accounts of professional successes and challenges related to the ambiguity in their positions. As a higher education diversity professional and researcher, I see the seriousness of this issue in my networks. Many CDOs encounter this vagueness in their roles, which makes it difficult for them to do their jobs.

Participants in this study faced a lack of organizational structure in their CDO positions. All the participants stated there is no template for the role and that the best place for a CDO is on the president's cabinet. All the participants dealt with resistance in their roles, and, yet, all stated that the heart of diversity work is in not shaming people. Most of the participants reported that they are outsiders within the composition of senior-level administrations. Last, all the participants

mentioned that personal background or characteristics have impacted their roles quite a bit. Although this study identified four themes connected to CDO structural ambiguity after interviewing the 14 participants, these may not be the only themes linked to experiencing organizational structure ambiguity in the CDO position. More research is needed using larger samples and analyzing for additional potential variables.

The research findings add to the existing literature surrounding the subject of CDOs in higher education. The findings provide information that can lead to the creation of a better structure for people ascending to the role of CDO or for institutions investing in the position. This study creates a special opportunity for college and university presidents to become better informed and better able to make decisions regarding the best use of college resources to advance diversity efforts. Future preventative measures enacted based on this research may afford better care for CDOs and the institutions they serve. For instance, setting a clear vision for the role will assist CDOs, being well-resourced will also move the work for CDOs, and having an outspoken president and board of trustees for the CDO will limit the resistance from the campus community.

CDO leadership is multifaceted, under-defined, and full of public agendas and secreted mandates (Nixon, 2017). The present study's findings create an opportunity for better awareness of the role of CDOs in higher education. College administrators and other interested stakeholders may utilize the study results to thoughtfully and intentionally develop and structure previously ambiguous CDO positions.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date: Interviewer: Shawn L. Washington

Location: Technology will be used to conduct interviews through Skype and/or Zoom software.

Interviewee: (A) (B) (C) (D) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I) (J)

Introduction: Before administering this interview protocol, I will review with the participant the Informed Consent Form that was signed before the initial interview and remind the participant that she or he can ask questions or choose to discontinue the interview at any time. I will then ask the participant if she or he has any questions or comments before beginning the interview. Before formally commencing the interview, I will confirm permission to record.

Researcher Describes the Study in the beginning of interview: The ambiguity of CDOs' work in higher education needs further exploration for excellence and inclusive mindfulness in organizational structure of a CDO (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2008). Colleges and universities must understand the perspectives of CDOs to be better equipped to support the role of a CDO. CDOs note that poorly constructed positions will hinder the accomplishment of their tasks as well as success, without a bond to ascend structure of the role (Leon, 2014). The central question in this phenomenological research study is to understand how CDOs describe their experiences with organizational structure role ambiguity. The areas of focus will be the areas of diversity, institutional change, institutional power, and collaboration as related to the phenomenon of the ambiguity in the organizational structure of the CDO role.

(Interview)

1. Describe your background (personal and professional). How has your personal and professional backgrounds (which includes family, school, friends, neighborhood, and work experiences) impacted/influenced you in becoming a CDO within higher education?
2. Describe your first year(s) of being a CDO. What did your role look and feel like?
3. Describe a challenging experience you encountered early in your CDO experience.
4. Describe a few accomplishments you have achieved in your role as a CDO.
5. Describe your professional learning about diversity work in higher education, especially how to support these institutions who are affected by institutional history challenges around diversity.
6. Describe your leadership engagement strategies when you are leading diversity initiative efforts at institutions.
7. After experiencing leading diversity work efforts, describe what you did, if anything, to adjust your leadership engagement strategies.

Closing Interview Statement & Follow Up Confirmation:

Thank you for your participation in this interview session. The next steps in this process will be for me to deliver to you this interview's transcription within the next 4 weeks. Then you will have an opportunity to check your input, confirm accuracy, and review. Please provide any comments, feedback, and/or revisions needed regarding the data collected to me at your earliest convenience. In addition, an individual summary will be sent to you for review within the next 8 weeks. Thank you again for your participation and look forward to hearing back from you on the interview transcript and individual summary feedback over the next 1–2 months.

Appendix B: Meaningful Statements

Meaningful Statements Derived from Data Analysis

CDO Participant	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
There was no template for this role	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Felt like I was on the outside looking in	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x			x	x
Wanted to create a systems approach to the work	x	x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x		
Advancing, creating, and impacting spaces and climate for students			x	x		x		x		x		x	x	
Being on the president's cabinet is the best position for the role	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
My role is not on the president's cabinet	x		x			x	x						x	x
There is no accountability for infusing diversity, equity, and inclusion in some departments (such as academic affairs)	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x			x	x
Microaggressions have impacted much of my work	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x			
I have support from my president	x	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	x		
When issues arise, I feel it's my responsibility to resolve them		x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x		x
It is not about shaming people	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
It is a difficult dynamic to build trust and relationships with individuals		x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Having a balance of sharing my own perspective and understanding others'		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	
My personal background impacted quite a bit	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Appendix C: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.*

Shawn L. Washington

Digital Signature

Shawn L. Washington

Name (Typed)

11-25-2019

Date