Formation of Successful Partnerships between Rural Community College Workforce Development Offices and Businesses: Motivation, Social Capital and Communication

Ryan Nausieda
Western Michigan University, rnausied@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations

Part of the Community College Education Administration Commons, Community College Leadership Commons, and the Higher Education Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/387

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.
FORMATION OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT OFFICES AND BUSINESSES: MOTIVATION, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND COMMUNICATION

by

Ryan Nausieda

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology, Western Michigan University, December 2014

Doctoral Committee:
Andrea Beach, Ph.D., Chair
Daniel Gaymer, Ed.D.
Pamela Eddy, Ph.D.
The financial resources in rural areas are not plentiful, which has impacted the workforce development offices’ ability to provide training on their own. These workforce development offices rely on partnerships to provide training to the community. There are multiple motivations that align between workforce development office and community organizations. The social capital in a partnership is utilized in these rural areas to accomplish mutual goals between multiple organizations that one could not complete on alone. Social capital in a partnership includes trust, centrality, information, and density. Communication helps to support the motivation, social capital and hence the sustainability of a partnership.

The motivation to partner, social capital, and communication all play a part in the formation of successful partnership. Previous research on the topic leads to the research questions explored in this study. The first primary research question seeks to understand how successful partnerships are formed between workforce development offices and businesses. The sub-questions examine the motivation and social capital that takes place during this formation. The second primary research question examines the communication practices that take place during the formation of successful partnerships.
The sub-questions examine the internal and external communication the workforce development practitioners have during this formation. I examined two case studies that involved interviews, observations, and document analysis to determine what these factors looked like in a successful partnership.

The participants expressed the importance of relationships as a resource in rural areas. The participants expressed their needs, kept a pulse on the partners, strengthened links with other partners, knew signposts of formation, and knew that communication supports the formation process. The findings that emerged match findings in the past literature and highlight the rural context and concepts of motivation, social capital, and communication. The partnerships formed with rural serving community colleges have the ability to help the greater community. Finally, there are seven recommendations for best practices in creating a successful rural partnership: express the message, keep a pulse on motivations, value information, determine who is central, be honest and trustworthy, request informal meetings, and be mindful of communication.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am so grateful for the support I have received from so many people. My committee members have been a great support and their wisdom has helped to guide this project. I would like to thank the three members of my committee Dr. Andrea Beach, Dr. Daniel Gaymer, and Dr. Pamela Eddy. A special thanks to my committee chair, Andrea Beach for supporting me through my dissertation and other projects I have worked on during my tenure.

I dedicate this dissertation to Erin and Winston. Without their support I would not have been able to complete this project. I have been able to enjoy this process because they are a reminder to me of the preciousness of life, which helped me to know when to put the writing down and when to pick it back up again. I love you two with all of my heart and now it is time for me to support you through your trek forward in your education.

My family, friends, and colleagues have been a tremendous help throughout this entire process. I hope that everyone who has connected with me through the completion of this dissertation understands the impact they have had on me. The relationships that I have were a foundation for me to be able to complete this research; I could not have done it without the people that surround me.

Ryan Nausieda
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... ii

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................... ix

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. x

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1

   Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................. 6

   Research Questions .............................................................................................................. 8

   Methodology ........................................................................................................................ 9

   Delimitations and Limitations .............................................................................................. 10

   Summary .............................................................................................................................. 10

II. LITERATURE REVIEW ....................................................................................................... 11

   Workforce Development Offices ......................................................................................... 11

   Partnerships ........................................................................................................................ 15

      Partnerships and workforce development centers ............................................................ 16

      Successful partnerships .................................................................................................... 18

      Forming partnerships ....................................................................................................... 21

      Development of a partnership .......................................................................................... 22

   The Three Types of Capital in Partnerships ........................................................................ 27

      Social capital in partnerships ............................................................................................ 29

      Communication .................................................................................................................. 35

      Internal communication .................................................................................................... 35
## Table of Contents – Continued

### CHAPTER

- External communication .............................................................. 36
- Formal communication ........................................................................ 37
- Informal communication ..................................................................... 37
- Summary ........................................................................................... 38
- Conceptual Framework ....................................................................... 38

### III. METHODOLOGY ................................................................. 41

- Study Methodology ........................................................................... 42
- Case selection .................................................................................... 43
- Participant selection .......................................................................... 48

### Data ............................................................................................... 49

- Interviews .......................................................................................... 49
- Documents ........................................................................................ 50
- Observations ....................................................................................... 51

### Data Analysis .................................................................................. 51

- Two stages of analysis ....................................................................... 51
- Confirming case study findings .......................................................... 53

### IV. FINDINGS .................................................................................. 54

- Greenridge Community College Case ............................................... 55
- Greenridge technical center ............................................................... 55
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents – Continued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participants..................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The grant ................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The partnership ..........................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes: Greenridge Technical Center ..........................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation....................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationships ..............................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust ..................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and understanding ................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication.............................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of findings........................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treetops Community College Case ................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treetops technical center ......................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The participants..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship at the start of the partnership....................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The partnership......................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes: Treetops Technical Center ................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationships........................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust ..................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and understanding ...................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents – Continued

CHAPTER

Communication.................................................................100
Summary of findings..........................................................106
Cross-Case Themes............................................................107
Theme one: The needs .......................................................108
Theme two: The pulse.........................................................114
Theme three: Strength of the links......................................118
Theme four: Sign posts of sustaining...................................122
Summary...............................................................................125
Research Questions ................................................................127
Research question 1 ...........................................................127
Research question 1a ..........................................................128
Research question 1b ..........................................................129
Research question 2 ...........................................................131
Research question 2a..........................................................131
Research question 2b ..........................................................132
Conclusion ...........................................................................133

V. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..........................135
Discussion of Findings..........................................................135
Model of partnership formation between technical centers and
businesses.............................................................................137
# Table of Contents – Continued

## CHAPTER

- Motivation..................................................................................................................138
- Elements of social capital .........................................................................................143
- Communication is a key support..............................................................................150
- Limitations ................................................................................................................154
- Seven Recommendations for Practice .................................................................155
  - Express the message ...............................................................................................156
  - Keep a pulse on motivations ..................................................................................156
  - Value information ....................................................................................................157
  - Determine who is central .......................................................................................157
  - Be honest and trustworthy ......................................................................................158
  - Request informal meetings .....................................................................................159
  - Be mindful of communication ...............................................................................160
- Summary ..................................................................................................................160
- Recommendations for Further Research ...............................................................161
- Conclusion ................................................................................................................163

## REFERENCES ..............................................................................................................165

## APPENDICES

- A. Invitations to Participate in Study .................................................................175
- B. Data Sources ........................................................................................................179
- C. Interview Guide ....................................................................................................180
Table of Contents – Continued

CHAPTER

D. Consent Form.........................................................................................................................182

E. HSIRB Approval.....................................................................................................................184
LIST OF TABLES

1. Participants in Greenridge Study ................................................................. 56
2. Participants in Treetops Study ..................................................................... 84
3. Emergent Themes and Subthemes ..................................................................108
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Partnership Development Model ................................................................. 22
2. Social Capital in Partnerships ......................................................................... 30
3. Graphic Representation of High and Low Density ......................................... 31
4. Conceptual Framework .................................................................................. 40
5. Model of Partnership Formation between Technical Centers and Businesses ....136
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Center on Education and the Workforce projected that by the year 2018 there will be 46.8 million new jobs created or re-created and 63% of these positions will require a post-secondary education; 30% of these positions will need an Associate’s Degree or some college education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). The United States is on the path of a knowledge-based economy requiring increasingly advanced skill sets and educational credentials (Amey, Eddy, & Campbell, 2010; Friedel, 2008; United States Government Accountability Office, 2008). These requirements translate to, employers hiring workers who have a post-secondary education for positions. American workers without a post-secondary education will have a difficult time obtaining positions compared to past generations that held jobs with only a high school diploma (Carnevale et al., 2010).

Community colleges play a large role in the U.S. postsecondary educational landscape; almost half of undergraduate students attend a community college (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Of all the community college districts in the United States, 64% are rural and one third of the community college students enroll in rural community colleges (Cejda, 2007; Rural Community College Alliance, 2013). Eddy and Murray (2007) defined rural community colleges “as public two-year institutions with a physical address outside the hundred largest standard or consolidated metropolitan statistical areas” (p. 1). Community colleges are affordable options for students given an average annual tuition and fees rate in 2011-2012 of $2,963, whereas a four-year college cost students $8,244 (American Association of Community Colleges,
Added to meeting the educational and academic requirements of students is the mission of being responsive to needs of their local communities (Van Noy, Jacobs, Korey, Bailey, & Hughes, 2008). The mission of responding to the community has produced additional demands for community colleges, including academic transfer, vocational-technical, continuing education, developmental education, and community service (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Katsinas & Hardy, 2012).

Rural community colleges have many of the same missions that urban and suburban community colleges, but also contend with invisibility in policy making, isolated regions, lowering populations, lack of economic growth, and rising poverty (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Eddy, 2007; Katsinas & Hardy, 2012). On top of this, the people in rural areas have a strong commitment to place; the community college may be the only reasonable option to improve their skills to stay competitive (Katsinas & Hardy, 2012). Even with this full range of foci, vocational education continues to be an important path to opportunity for American workers (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

Vocational education at community colleges is a part of the workforce development mission, which is defined as “all institutional programs, courses, and activities that prepare students for work” (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006, p. 53). Almost every community college in the U.S. has a workforce development office, which is responsible for partnering with area employers to meet their needs for skilled workers. There are many businesses that face challenges in finding people with specific skills to fulfill the requirements of their open positions (Alssid et al., 2002). Community colleges have the charge of training students for careers that fits within the needs of the businesses (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Pauley, 2001). Workforce development is a pressure point for
community colleges; these programs have to stay current to teach students the skills to be competitive in local markets (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Friedel, 2008).

Partnerships are a method for workforce development offices at rural community colleges and businesses to join forces with each other to achieve goals. These efforts have the potential to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the economically challenged context in which higher education is placed (Hoffman, 2007). Eddy (2010b) indicates that partnerships are “between or among institutions, through departmental alliances across institutions, or with university programs that pair with businesses or community agencies” (p. 1). Community college partnerships with businesses have been touted as the answer to developing a more prepared workforce (Ashford, 2011). Yet, difficulties exist within these ventures. There are many challenges when developing a partnership, which is evident by the failure of many of these endeavors (Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Watson, 2007). Amey et al. (2007) states that “despite perceived initial benefits, many partnerships fail to obtain desired results, cannot be sustained, or cease to benefit both parties” (p.8). Even though many partnerships fail, there is still a push for these endeavors to move forward as the potential benefits can outweigh the potential of failure.

Successful partnerships help organizations stay competitive. Leaders need a framework to understand what makes partnerships successful to help negate failure (Eddy & Amey, 2011; Mohr & Spekman, 1994). As part of the framework, Russell and Flynn (2000) define a successful partnership as one that:

* Is sustainable (i.e., partners wish to continue working together, sufficient resources can be generated to continue operations).
* Is viewed positively by all partners, which may be due to a variety of reasons, but would generally include the perception that the collaboration was useful and productive.

* Generates positive outcomes in accordance with the goals and purposes of the collaborative entity.

* Creates a means of open and equal communication and decision making.

* Provides an improved mechanism to achieve common purposes more readily (e.g., more efficiently, at reduced cost, with better quality) through partnership than alone. (p. 200)

The overall success of a partnership is grounded in the partnership formation process.

The formation of a partnership includes three phases (Amey et al., 2007). The first phase includes the antecedents and motivations that bring about the partnership. The second phase, the development of a partnership, is critical in the overall process; it is the base upon which the partnership operates. The third phase is the process leading to sustainability, which contains the long-term projections of a partnership (Amey et al., 2007; Eddy, 2010b). The three phases of partnership formation overlap on one another and provide a framework for examination of partnerships.

During the formation process, there are motivations for workforce development offices and businesses to take part in partnerships. Partners need not share the same motivations for joining a partnership, but partners need to gain an advantage from the relationship (Amey et al., 2007; Eddy, 2010b). Motivations are impacted by perceived benefits. When the benefits disproportionately go to one partner over the other, this can negatively influence the desire to continue the partnership or to join future partnerships.
There are consequences of such disparity; partners who have less motivation to take part in a partnership bring less to the partnership, have less involvement, and may choose to leave prematurely. Partners who give too much to the partnership may not see the return on their investment and experience a decline in motivation (Amey et al., 2007; Eddy, 2010b). A change in motivation can alter an ongoing partnership. Understanding partnership motivation is an area for workforce development offices and businesses to focus on during the process of forming a partnership.

Existing relationships can motivate two parties to begin a partnership (Amey et al., 2007). The relationships between people serve as a bonding agent at the beginning of a partnership (Eddy, 2010b). Within workforce development offices, the relationships of the individuals with businesses builds social capital to be drawn on in the formation of a partnership. Amey et al. (2010) defines social capital as “an intangible resource for productive ends and is inherent in social relationships and structures” (p. 337). Social capital is a resource partners can use to act on their motivations to begin a partnership. Each individual has varying degrees of social capital that will produce value from a partnership and their home organizations (Eddy, 2010b). The concept of social capital brings with it the idea that if there is an investment in relationships the individuals involved will gain something desirable and it is a challenge to build. Time must be invested into creating healthy relationships. Relationships between people can only flourish when people know and trust one another. The area of trust is recursive; trust cultivates trust and also grows through transparency and rewards (Prusak & Cohen, 2001).
Many researchers have emphasized communication as a critical component for the success of partnerships (Amey, 2010; Bosma et al., 2010; Bracken, 2007; Eddy, 2010a, 2010b; Mohr & Spekman, 1994; Nausieda, 2014). The interactions that take place between people in partnerships build the structure of relationships, how others perceive the partnership, and also provide information on the shared meaning of what is desired (Eddy, 2010b). The relationships and communication of the individuals involved are central concepts in partnership formation that will be further explored in this research.

Purpose of the Study

Very few researchers bring together community colleges, motivation, social capital, and the formation of partnerships in their research (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et al., 2007; Eddy, 2010b; Eddy & Amey, 2014). In addition to these elements, communication is also a critical component in the formation of partnerships. There are scholars who do discuss communication as an important element to a successful partnership, however, little is known about the specifics of the required communication (Amey et al., 2007; Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Communication can influence the commitment of individuals in an organization to partake in a partnership (Elving, 2005). The internal stakeholder’s commitment and trust to a partner is influenced by the communication they receive and the way a partnership is portrayed to the stakeholders plays a part in the success of partnerships, because communication is a key to positive performance (Eddy, 2010b). The approach that workforce development practitioners use to communicate internally to stakeholders and externally to partners has a role in the overall success of the formation of the partnership. This research focuses on rural community colleges as these institutions have many of the same missions as urban
institutions, yet they face unique difficulties, such as rising poverty, that comes with this classification (Eddy, 2007). The rural context creates a particular setting for forming successful partnerships.

This research utilizes and extends the ideas of Amey and Eddy and the models that these researchers developed. These models illustrate the process of partnership formation and the role of social capital. Amey et al. (2007) created a partnership development model. Eddy (2010b) and Amey et al. (2010) focus in particular on the role of social capital in partnership development. Social capital, the main focus of this study, is further explained in terms of the relationship components of density, information, centrality, trust, and feedback loops (Eddy, 2010b).

The awareness of what results from successful partnerships is useful to leaders of organizations, in that there are costs and risks connected with forming a partnership (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Historically, researchers have offered little empirical research regarding the process of partnerships that are successful (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Most research examines what is gained from partnerships, but it is imperative that there is consideration of the process involved in the formation of a partnership (Amey et al., 2010). There are few recommendations for forming partnerships beyond the decision to start these relationships (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Having a model to follow is important, because the way that workforce development offices form partnerships will determine the overall success (Amey et al., 2007).

This study is important because it seeks to discover the elements leading to a successful partnership. Studying the successful partnerships between rural community colleges and businesses will lead to the development of these concepts. The success of a
partnership brings about sharing that can help organizations that may not have the means to accomplish particular goals without the collaborative effort. To make the partnership possible, each partner must utilize, and therefore allocate their resources. If a partnership fails after time, energy, and resources are spent trying to make the partnership successful, then both parties lose by depleting their own set of resources.

Social capital as a resource does not deplete in the same way as other types of tangible resources, for instance like financial capital does (Adler & Kwon, 2002). The spending and amount of social capital held is less predictable. The misuse and underuse of relationships may cause depreciation of the social capital between individuals. The more a relationship is used does not mean that there is depreciation in social capital, whereas with some transactions the social capital is indeed reduced (Adler & Kwon, 2002). This study intends to deepen the understanding of social capital and communication in formation of partnerships to offer suggestions on the creation of a successful partnership.

Research Questions

This study will examine motivation, social capital, and communication during the formation of successful partnerships. The following research questions were pursued to study the formation of a successful partnership between workforce development offices at community colleges and businesses.

1. How do rural workforce development offices form successful partnerships between their community colleges and businesses?
   a. What role does motivation have in forming partnerships?
b. What role does social capital (trust, centrality, information, density) play in forming the partnership?

2. What communication practices take place in the formation of the successful partnership?
   a. How do workforce development practitioners communicate the partnership internally?
   b. How do workforce development practitioners communicate externally with partners?

Methodology

A qualitative research design was used to examine how workforce development offices at rural community colleges form successful partnerships between themselves and businesses. The perspective of the workforce development practitioners, stakeholders, leaders, and business partners was obtained regarding the formation of successful partnerships. The presence of social capital and communication practices will also be examined in the formation of partnerships. In the qualitative tradition, this study used the collective case study method to examine two sites (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Yin (2009) indicates that the completion of a case study entails examination of a phenomenon within a natural setting with many sources of data that are bound. Here, the study was bound by the formation of a partnership between workforce development offices at rural community colleges and businesses during a specific year (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Multiple sources of data provided thick description of the phenomenon involved in the formation of successful partnerships. The sources of data for the cases came from...
interviews, documents, and observations (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

**Delimitations and Limitations**

This study is delimited to two rural community colleges and workforce development offices and their business partners. There is also a delimitation of only focusing on stakeholders in the partnership, i.e. workforce development practitioners, faculty, and business leaders. There is the limitation of being qualitative case study research where the findings will not be generalizable to other partnerships and the assumption that participants are being truthful in their interviews.

**Summary**

Community colleges form partnerships with businesses to achieve their goals and missions. The purpose of this research is to understand the process of the formation of successful partnerships between workforce development offices at rural community colleges and businesses with an attention on motivation, social capital in partnerships, and the communication of the workforce development practitioners that occurs internally with stakeholders and externally with partners. The following chapters are structured to best discuss the topic at hand. Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature drawing on research of such scholars as Amey and Eddy. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the collective case study methodology. Chapter 4 provides an account of the findings from the collective case studies. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the summary of the findings, connection of findings to literature, implications, and recommendations for practice.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter has four sections. The first section explores the historic development of workforce development at community colleges and reviews current challenges. The second section outlines how successful partnerships may provide answers to organizational challenges, with a focus on the formation of partnerships. Stages of partnerships include motivations and antecedents to the partnerships, the development of partnerships, and the process of sustaining partnerships (Amey et al., 2007; Eddy & Amey, 2014). Discussions of feedback loops among partners and how the roles of champions underlie the entire formation-of-partnerships process explicates important features of partnerships. The third section covers the construct of social capital and the role that it plays in partnerships (Amey et al., 2007; Eddy & Amey, 2014). The final section of this chapter examines the research regarding internal, external, formal and informal communication in relation to partnerships.

Workforce Development Offices

Community colleges have been involved in workforce development in the form of job training since the early 1900s (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000). Workforce development includes “all institutional programs, courses, and activities that prepare students for work” (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006, p. 53). The significance of these programs is seen in student matriculation rates; three out of five students who attend community colleges enroll in workforce preparation programs (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Workforce development education at community colleges can culminate in an Associate’s degree or certificate. Sometimes an employer may even utilize these programs to retrain
employees. The concept of workforce development in the community college includes credit and non-credit programs, technical programs, career programs, and contract training. Workforce development has grown to be a top priority for community colleges by operating on strengths such as organizational flexibility, relationships with businesses, and history of teaching traditional and non-traditional students (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). The history of workforce development in the community college illustrates the confluence of events that have brought it to the current context.

Beginning in the 1950s and through the 1960s workforce development became a central mission of community colleges (Dougherty, 2001; Friedel, 2008; Kolins & Stackpole, 1999). During this time period government officials and community college administrators intended to attract businesses to their local areas by lobbying for the workforce development function of the community college and lowering training costs (Friedel, 2008). Due to a confluence of government decisions from local, state, and federal levels, the demand for vocational training in community colleges increased significantly during this time period (Dougherty, 2001). In the late 1960s, the rate of growth for vocational education grew steadily and the increase continued into the 1970s. In 1963, there were 219,766 students in occupational programs and this number more than doubled by 1969 to 448,229. By 1975, a total of 1,389,516 students involved. The classification of programs changed in 1975, so data beyond this point could not be utilized to further tell the story (Cohen & Brawer, 2008).

In the 1980s, the growing trend of vocational training began to level off, and the United States fell into economic decline. As businesses laid-off manufacturing positions, the need for workforce development was cut back. Community colleges were called on
to aid with the economic recovery of their communities. During this decade many manufacturing sites moved overseas, and the Midwest experienced an agricultural recession that contributed to a shift to service based fields (Friedel, 2008).

When state economies began to suffer, government officials pointed to community colleges as a solution (Friedel, 2008; Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Thus, on the one hand, vocational training was diminished due to the loss of manufacturing jobs, yet on the other hand, community colleges were sought to help in the economic development of local communities.

Government officials created policies meant to offer financial incentives to keep and attract new employers to their States. In response, businesses sought outside vendors for training to aid with costs. Community colleges responded to this need by developing non-credit opportunities as well as contract training (Friedel, 2008; Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). This training was not tied to the credit side of the community college, so course developers had greater liberties when creating and facilitating the training, as well as the ability to make changes quickly to fit the needs of businesses. By the 1990s, the federal government pushed community colleges to develop training specifically to further the education of people to overcome poverty and unemployment (Friedel, 2008). By this time, workforce development offices at community colleges had become centers with multiple missions and non-academic staff; they also provided non-credit training to many students (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006).

Up to the present, American culture has looked to community colleges during times of economic challenges as well as a means to get people not ready for college prepared for the four-year system (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). The push from
government, communities, businesses, and college administrators throughout the past several decades has kept this mission a part of the college. For community colleges, the expansion of the workforce development mission brought about several challenges. One such challenge is that other parts of the community college experienced a decline in prominence and resources (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Tensions at community colleges sometimes arise between faculty and staff in traditional academic areas and those in vocational areas. A belief of academically based faculty is that workforce development education is less rigorous and has lower standards, and draws scarce resources away from the academic mission (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Tensions also exist because the terminal degrees in vocational programs, which can be job training focused, can pull away from the function of transfer to a 4-year institution (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006).

In contrast, workforce development faculty may view traditional education as a pull away from necessary training of technical skills (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Amidst these tensions, workforce development faces the challenges of shrinking employer demand for workforce training, a decrease in state funding, and increased competition. The workforce development function of community colleges came head-to-head with “an extremely uncertain future because of structural changes in the economy and the emergence of new competitors” (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006, p. 53). For instance, for-profit universities, such as the University of Phoenix, provide technical degrees that are very competitive with community college programs (Jacobs & Dougherty, 2006). Leaders of community colleges have to make decisions that will make their institutions competitive with other institutions. One such decision often focuses on building partnerships with local businesses and the training needs of these organizations.
There has been a movement on the part of government to build structures to improve workforce training. The Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act was signed by President Barack Obama in 2010 and this included the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant. The TAACCCT grant includes 2 billion dollars that will last four years (500 million a year) to improve delivery of career education for high skilled and high paying jobs that can be done in two years or less, while also meeting the needs of the employers (Community College Times, 2011; United States Department of Labor, 2013). The money has been used to build innovative partnerships between community colleges and business to be able to train dislocated workers, to help the colleges develop relevant programs, and to help meet the employer’s needs (United States Department of Labor, 2013).

The community college has been at the center of workforce development for over half a century. Community college leaders, government initiatives, and student needs have pushed the mission of workforce development forward. The following section examines the central topic of partnerships and highlights specific partnerships at rural community colleges that relate to workforce development, what makes partnerships successful, and the formation of partnerships.

**Partnerships**

Workforce development centers at rural community colleges, like their urban counterparts, seek to accommodate their particular community’s needs. These centers for workforce development have relied on partnerships to develop their programs. Two examples of these centers and partnerships are the Michigan Technological Education Centers (M-TECs) and the Indiana Center for the Life Sciences. These two centers differ
in that one is a large center with multiple missions (M-TEC), whereas the other has a narrower mission that focuses on a particular field. These two initiatives provide examples of two contexts and the motivations that spurred the formation of partnerships.

**Partnerships and workforce development centers.** Much of the vocational training at community colleges is completed by centers for economic development (Dougherty, 2001). One example of these centers, are Michigan’s M-TECs. There are currently 18 M-TECs within the Michigan community college sector. The entities offer statewide workforce development education specifically for Michigan businesses. According the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (2013) these centers provide “entry-level training, to highly customized advanced training packages, the M-TECs work with companies and other organizations to find solutions to meet whatever training needs exist” (p. 1). M-TECs focus on their customers (businesses and job seekers) to provide valuable training.

Russell (2001) described the beginnings of the M-TEC at the Bay de Noc Community College. In 1998, the State of Michigan offered funds to build eight M-TECs at community colleges to help educate individuals to fill a gap in the need for skilled workers. There was a proposal process for community colleges to build an M-TEC. Bay de Noc Community College was motivated to complete a proposal because of the funding and for the opportunity to serve the Upper Peninsulas’ training needs. They were able to win the proposal to build an M-TEC, which was dedicated in March of 2000 (Russell, 2001).

The Bay De Noc M-TEC serves the whole of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula which is 20,000 square miles with a population of 300,000. Escanaba is the town in which this
M-TEC is located and that is the the manufacturing center of the Upper Peninsula. A person must travel 60 minutes from this manufacturing center of the upper peninsula to reach a town of 5,000-30,000 people. When Bay de Noc Community College decided to create the M-TEC, they were able to develop strategic partnerships with businesses, labor unions, government, and other educational institutions. By having these centers operate like a business to meet the customer’s needs, this facility chose to promote customized training, which would include training in all areas of the peninsula. This arm of the community college utilized their existing educational offering in workforce development and traditional academics as the base for the training.

The Bay de Noc M-TEC collaborated with many different types of industries such as technology, paper, logging, cable providers, and manufacturing. Through the partnership, the college obtained equipment they could not afford from collaborating with these organizations for training purposes. For example, Softek, a computer hardware and software company, provided computers. With the computers, the community college set up a Prometric Testing Center to take tests to obtain certifications in information technology. This option created a geographically accessible testing center for more students in this rural area to take the test locally. This example illustrates how a partnership with external businesses is based on mutual gains and the ability to leverage resources (Russell, 2001).

The Indiana Center for the Life Sciences at Ivy Tech Community College-Bloomington provides another example of a workforce development center at a rural community college (Carnegie Classification, 2013; Whikehart, 2009). This center is the result of a partnership between the college and county government with assistance from
private businesses. In the area of this community college, many traditional manufacturing corporations began to close. Two motivating factors that pushed the development of the facility forward: the economic downturn and a survey from the Bloomington Economic Corporation that indicated life sciences had a positive future job outlook. The partnership received $3 million in grants from The Indiana Department of Workforce Development to start up this facility (Indiana Center for the Life Sciences, 2013a). This center allows education, government, and industry to provide workforce preparation in life sciences and to present a unified face to current and future employers (Indiana Center for the Life Sciences, 2013b; Whikehart, 2009).

The M-TEC at Bay de Noc Community College and the Indiana Center for the Life Sciences at Ivy Tech Community College-Bloomington are two examples of rural community colleges involved in partnerships to support the economic development of a community. The M-TEC is a comprehensive center; the Indiana Center for the Life Sciences focuses primarily in one area. The knowledge how partnerships, such as these two, garner success can guide organizations with the selection of partners as well as the maintenance of relationships (Mohr & Spekman, 1994).

**Successful partnerships.** This section addresses the attributes associated with successful partnerships in past research. The three research studies in this section contain lists of items that propel a partnership towards success. Themes from the three studies are highlighted at the end of this section to help pinpoint common elements that are pertinent to successful partnerships. The perspective of organizations and their partnering are illustrated in these studies, showing both sides of a partnership. There are
many resources directed to make partnerships successful, so understanding how to attain success is important to the organizations involved.

To understand what factors participants viewed as leading to successful partnerships, Russell and Flynn (2000) conducted a survey of the 11 authors who were cited in their article. The most important factors that lead to a successful partnership are listening, respect, commitment, selection of partner, flexibility, and frequent communication. In addition to survey answers, Russell and Flynn asked participants what added to the success of the partnership; they reported that trust, a broad collaborative vision, relationships building, empowerment of internal and external participants, and administrative support and resources were critical to success. Russell and Flynn also asked the participants what partnerships should avoid when trying to create a successful partnership. These factors included avoiding power struggles, one-sided control of the agenda, early failures, being overly time driven, trying to accomplish too much too fast, and involving people who are not respectful of different opinions. The result of Russell and Flynn’s study illustrates which characteristics leads away and toward the success of partnerships. The conclusion from the article was that building a partnership is much like building any personal relationship. The partnership is not something that should be done without forethought and the knowledge of time and resources it will take to build. Russell and Flynn state that a partnership can be successful amid difficulties if members of a partnership focus on the factors of success that were mentioned in their article.

The actions that a workforce development practitioner takes may also affect the operation of a partnership. Mohr and Spekman (1994) investigated relationships between
manufacturers and dealers within the computer industry utilizing survey methodology. The study focuses on the perceptions of the partnership from the perspective of the partnering organization, which was that of the dealers. They found support for the following attributes of successful partnerships: commitment, coordination, trust, communication quality, participation, joint planning, and joint problem solving. The research that differentiates successful from unsuccessful partnerships is important; this allows leaders to use the factors to contribute to their success and keep themselves away from the pitfalls that lead to an unsuccessful partnership.

Sink and Jackson (2002) examined the partnerships of the Blue Ridge Community College in North Carolina from the perspective of the partnering agencies. The researchers surveyed leaders at these agencies to complete their research exploring successful collaborations, the benefits, areas of improvement, and lessons learned. The categories leading to the success of a partnership were embedded in four categories: economic, leadership, relationships, and mutual benefits. The five elements within these categories marked most often were (a) political/social climate favorable, (b) the college seen as a leader in the community, (c) shared vision, (d) mutual respect, understanding, trust, and (e) unique purpose for partnering. After analyzing the survey Sink and Jackson (2002) conducted a focus group, where many of the participants indicated surprise that communication did not appear in the top five categories of the survey. Sink and Jackson asked the focus group to come to a consensus on what they thought the top five categories should include. The five that they ultimately decided on were (a) college is seen as a leader in the community, (b) shared vision, (c) partnership see collaboration in their self-interest, (d) mutual respect and trust, and (e) open and frequent
communication. Through examination of the survey and the focus groups, Sink and Jackson discovered that partners indicated organizations should focus on communication, relationships, and commitment. There are four areas that the researchers recommended to make partnership more successful: the quantity and quality of communication, joint planning, program needs, and resources.

These three studies explore similar themes on what it takes to build a successful partnership. Although these studies indicate that successful partnerships are possible, there are still partnerships that fail to reach their goals, so there may be other factors that contribute to failure. Three ideas that remain constant through all three studies indicate the importance of three attributes in particular: commitment, communication, and trust. Two of the studies mentioned resources and relationships as quintessential as well. Finally, the formation of partnerships impact the success of these ventures overall (Amey et al., 2007; Eddy, 2010b).

**Forming partnerships.** Within the formation of partnerships there are three components: the antecedent, the development, and the sustaining of partnership. Amey et al. (2007) explain the process involved in developing and sustainable partnerships. Their model is graphically represented in Figure 1. The first phase of the model highlights the antecedents and the second phase involves the developing the partnership. The third phase of their model moves towards sustainability, unsustainability, or completing short-range goals. The partnership can end at any time during this process for any reason, either ending in a positive, completed project or a negative, failed project. Also, individual members of the partnership can leave at any time in the process. The partnership is an organic process where each of the individuals in the partnership will
change over time (i.e. work styles, personalities, etc.), which influences the continued success of a collaborative effort.

**Development of a partnership.** To understand the development process leading to partnership sustainability this current study will follow the research of Amey and Eddy. Following the partnership development model antecedents will be covered first, followed by context, motivation, and outcomes, which are essential concepts to examine when investigating the formation of partnerships (Amey et al., 2007; Eddy, 2010b).

![Partnership Development Model](image)

**Figure 1.** Partnership Development Model. (Amey et al., 2007, p. 10)

**Antecedents and context.** There are many reasons that organizations may want to partner: “Antecedents include, but are not limited to, the resources available to the individuals partners, the motivations they have for partnering, the policy context in which they operate, and existing relationships in which they are involved” (Amey et al., 2010, p. 337). The antecedents of a partnership do matter. For instance, the past experience of a
relationship is cast over current relationships; many times this makes it easier because people are then familiar with each other’s work. In informal partnerships, the relationships are critical to beginning, whereas mandated partnerships do not always benefit from this familiarity (Eddy, 2010b). Amey et al. (2007) indicated that shared understanding, relationships, and roles precede a successful partnership. The antecedents are contextual challenges that are previous to a partnership, but they also contribute to the motivation to partner (Ozaki, Amey, & Watson, 2007).

An organization that makes the decision to delve into a partnership does so within a context. The context will change how the decision is made to partner as well as how the partnership is developed (Amey et al., 2007). The context brings about the need to develop a partnership and to sustain the partnership.

Reed, Cooper, and Young (2007) case demonstrated how the changes in a context in a partnership alter the motivations for partners to continue forward (Ozaki et al., 2007). A push from legislation prompted a partnership between the seven departments at the University of Hawaii and several community colleges to offer an Interdisciplinary Master’s Degree in Education for teachers on remote parts of the islands. The community colleges were able to offer sites for the education to take place, technical, and clerical support. There were contextual changes that were a hindrance to sustaining of the partnership, including leadership and faculty changes. The university began to offer new graduate programs to the remote parts of the State and there was other competition from colleges such as the University of Phoenix, so the need for this degree declined. There was also competition for instructor time because of the interdisciplinary nature of the degree, which had no designated faculty members. The degree started to move
towards an online format and started to lose support from faculty members, who believed that social relationships were an important part of the program and would be diminished by technology. The partnership developed because of contextual element, but also was not able to sustain because of these changes in the context and thereby the motivation to continue the partnership ended.

**Motivation.** The motivations for a community college to partner with businesses are as diverse as the possible number of partners (Russell & Flynn, 2000). Motivation is an antecedent that is a focus of this research. Motivations brought to the partnership by all partners can influence the partnership over time (Eddy, 2010b). A lack of resources and a need for innovation creates motivation for partnerships (Amey et al., 2010; Eckel & Hartley, 2008). A few motivations for community college and businesses to join partnerships are sharing facilities, legislative drive, expansion, joining a new market, personal relationships, sharing in the risk, alignment of missions and goals, and resources (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et al., 2007; Orr, 2001). Businesses have the motivation to upgrade the skills of potential and existing employees. For example, the employees at a business might need to update their customer service skills. Community colleges are willing to accommodate businesses with training, because it aligns with the mission to provide services to the community (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000).

In terms of motivation, partners are driven by the overarching concepts of economics and altruism (Eddy, 2010b; Eddy & Amey, 2014). Herzberg (1987) explains that there are two factors when examining the concepts of motivation: motivators and hygiene. Both of these may have similar immediate outcomes. Motivators are intrinsic rewards of work and growth that have long term benefits, whereas hygiene factors are
extrinsic rewards requiring constant attention. The intrinsic motivation stems from achievement, idealism, recognition, power, work itself, and responsibility. The extrinsic motivation leads to movement is the policies, money, mandates, and activation of power (Eddy, 2010b; Herzberg, 1987). There are many individuals involved in a partnership; some may take part because of their intrinsic drive, whereas others may be activated by money or orders from the supervisor. The goals of partners are often seen in their motivations for partnering with another organization. The blend of motivations inevitably influences the path of partnership. For example, if partners are forced into a partnership, they may not experience intrinsic motivation. On the other side, if the partners have shared goals there is more drive and intrinsic motivation. Both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations will develop a different context in which the partners will have to operate (Eddy, 2010b).

Three factors that can alter the motivation of a partnership are outcomes, status, and resources (Amey et al., 2010). The positive outcomes of a partnership are a motivation to continue forward. A partnership’s progression is based on potential outcomes and the context of leadership and the institution. The status of the individuals in the partnership in their home institutions may be different levels (i.e. president, workforce development practitioner) of the organization; this may have an effect on the relationships of the individuals during the formation of the partnership. In addition, the resources available to each individual from their home institution to use in the partnership may differ (Amey et al., 2010).

**Feedback and champions.** The following two sections cover two parts of the partnership development model: feedback and champions. Feedback is the factor in a
partnership that allows members to see the outcomes and also help with decisions and forming the context where the partnership is continued or ended. The feedback partners receive is essential to the formation of a partnership. Feedback alters decision making. It also builds a context in the development and sustaining of a partnership (Amey et al., 2007).

In addition to feedback being a factor in the partnership development model is the idea of the champion. In this current research “a champion is defined as an individual who advocates for the development of a partnership and who brings together others to engage in the project” (Eddy, 2010b, p. 28). The champions of the partnerships can be the workforce development practitioners, business partners, or a separate individual or group. Champions play a central role in the formation of a partnership (Amey et al., 2010; Eddy, 2010b). The champion believes in and promotes the partnership goals (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et al., 2007). Champions do not need to hold a formal leadership role at their institution, although they do need support of these leaders (Amey et al., 2010).

The champion’s communication affects the partnership, specifically in regards to sustainability. The champion brings a passion to the partnership and acts as a central communicator; as well, this person has decision-making abilities in regards to resources. Champions need to develop a vision, guide the process, gauge and support the commitment levels of partnership members, and communicate the mission and outcomes of the partnership. The champion’s role is to determine the benefits of the partnership and to communicate them to others in their home organization such that they can understand the importance of the partnership (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et
The network of connections that a champion has can change how much influence this person may have on the partnership process (Amey et al., 2010). If the champion decides to leave the partnership then the partnership may not withstand that change, thus negatively impacting the partnership. Relying too much on the champion can diminish the institutionalization of the partnership and will potentially negatively affect the partnership (Amey et al., 2010).

Hoffman (2007) told the story of a champion, John Bardy, who helped to bring a university and a community college together. John was an organizational consultant hired by the university after the articulation agreement with the community college was signed. Those who were involved with the partnership stated that he was held in very high esteem by the leadership and had many contacts in education and business. John was influential in the development of the partnership he was able to act as a negotiator to get things done. He encouraged and directed the partnership by holding work groups and meetings that were held frequently. People at both the university and the community college believed in John and his capacity to organize and lead the partnership forward. He was deemed to be the champion of the partnership (Hoffman, 2007).

The partnership development model is a formation process that includes the ideas of developing and sustaining (Amey et al., 2007), which includes antecedents, context, motivation, outcomes, champions, and feedback. The next section will cover the different types of capital that can be utilized in the formation of a partnership.

**The Three Types of Capital in Partnerships**

Capital is a part of the partnership development model (Amey et al., 2007; Amey et al, 2010). Within this model there are three forms of capital in partnerships: social
capital, organizational capital, and partnership capital. Since social capital is the main focus of this research it is examined at length in a subsequent section. As stated earlier, Amey et al. (2010) defines social capital as “an intangible resource for productive ends and is inherent in social relationships and structures” (p. 337). Organizational capital can be a tangible resource, such as space, technology, and funding for materials, but can also be intangible, such as access to knowledge or human resources (Eddy, 2010b). Members of an organization can draw on social and organizational capital to achieve their partnership goals.

Partnership capital moves beyond the social and organizational capital to form its own capital to be drawn from. Eddy and Amey (2014) define partnership capital as “the existence of shared norms, shared beliefs, and networking that align processes among individual collaborators” (pg. 14). Partnership capital emerges from the work together without requiring a particular individual and moving beyond the social capital of an individual or particular group to the capital that is produced from the partnership process (Eddy, 2010b). Each person has different power, resources, and intentions in varying degrees. The interactions individuals have create the level of partnership capital (Amey et al., 2010). All partnerships have the potential to become their own organizational unit with shared meaning among those involved. A change to social and organizational capital changes the partnership capital. Strengthening the partnership capital occurs through building trust, shared meaning, similar beliefs, societal/cultural norms, and aligned processes. Focus on strengthening the partnerships capital is the key to overcoming problems and fostering long-term partnerships (Amey et al., 2010; Eddy, 2010b).
Social capital in partnerships. Bourdieu (1983) developed the currently accepted theories concerning capital by advancing the idea of capital beyond economics in order to include cultural capital and social capital. Bourdieu focuses on social hierarchy and inequality, conceptualizing social capital as a way for the privileged to maintain their status (Field, 2003). As such, Bourdieu views social capital as a social network that it takes incredible effort to sustain and to leverage credit that directly produces and reproduces social structures (Bourdieu, 1983). Putnam (2000) argued that social capital is related to community and has eroded in American Society. He contends that the information and resources from social connectedness can be used to solve community problems (Eddy, 2010b).

According to Coleman, social capital “represents a resource because it involves the expectation of reciprocity, and goes beyond any given individual to involve wider networks whose relationships are governed by a high degree of trust and shared values” (as cited in Field, 2003, p. 20). He focused on utilizing social capital to combine two lines of thought: context changes action and people take action with self-interest. Social capital is productive, just as physical and human capital. Whereas physical capital is tangible and material, human capital is less tangible, existing in people’s skills and abilities. Social capital, which is even less tangible than human capital, exists in the relations between people (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988). Coleman (1988) explains obligations as important in the topic of social capital. A high degree of social capital means more obligations are owed to the individual than the individual owes to others. Following Coleman’s theory, if a Workforce Development Dean provides a business with training then the company has an obligation that needs to be reciprocated. This can be
seen as a credit slip that the Workforce Development Dean can use later; this individual can have multiple credit slips with multiple companies. These credit slips are used by the workforce development offices at community college to utilize their network to forward their mission (Coleman, 1988).

Bourdieu (1983), Putnam (2000), and Coleman (1988) have differing views on social capital, but all three acknowledged that social capital entails shared values, interpersonal relations, and personal connections (Field, 2003). Each individual brings different levels of social capital to the partnership. Eddy explains social capital in relation to community college partnerships. Figure 2 is a graphic representation of social capital in partnerships from Eddy’s work. There are five ideas related to social capital that are pertinent to partnerships: (a) density, (b) information, (c) centrality, (d) trust, and (e) feedback loops (Eddy, 2010b).

*Figure 2. Social Capital in Partnerships. (Eddy, 2010b, p. 31)*
**Density.** The first element of social capital is density, which refers to the strength and closeness of relationships. Figure 3 is a graphic representation of a high density and low density network. A social network consisting of close friends is a high-density network, and a group of people of acquaintances is a low-density network (Eddy, 2010b; Granovetter, 1983). Relationships with a high amount of density typically have more interaction and stronger ties allowing them to build norms, trust, and unified action (Amey et al., 2010; Coleman, 1988). Building strong ties can be costly in a dense network; it takes resources and focus that could be used in another area (Rowley, Behrens, & Krackhardt, 2000). Weak ties are also of value, where information and resources can be obtained that is not available in their strong ties. Individuals who have the ability to act within many weak ties have a mental flexibility that allows them to step beyond their inner circle of relationships (Granovetter, 1983). The American Association of Community Colleges (2006) recommends that community colleges push beyond their boundaries and foster networks to act on and learn from.

*Figure 3. Graphic Representation of High and Low Density.*
Information. A second key element of a social capital is information exchange. Through sharing information and having knowledge of the other institution, individuals can maintain the partnership while acting independently of each other (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). Information embedded in social relationships is a source of social capital, as it provides a foundation for action. Information as a form of social capital is expensive and not easy to gain because it requires attention, which is in limited supply. In terms of information, social relationships are not valuable because of an obligation or trust, but are instead valuable for the information gleaned from their interactions (Coleman, 1988). The ties in a social network are a channel for information (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998).

There are three benefits of information for workforce development offices: access, timing, and referrals (Burt, 1997). Access allows leaders to gain more information than they could without it. As far as timing, the information comes at an appropriate time. Early timing of information most often proves beneficial to a manager because he/she is able to make decisions based of this communication. Finally, referrals are likely to filter information that comes to the organization.

Hoffman (2007) examined the implementation of a strategic partnership to improve support during the student’s transition from Vadar Community College to Barone University (both pseudonyms). Barone was able to offer information on referrals to Vadar regarding students who were underprepared, so the student could start at the community college and prepare to transfer to the university to complete a four-year degree. Vadar benefited from the partnership through gaining access to clear information about the transition to a university that is not normally available. This information allowed the partnership to go beyond an articulation agreement to offer other forms of
support (alumni support, personalized advising, social integration, scholarships), it is often difficult for community colleges to coordinate this type of transition. The information that the community college received was of great use to better prepare students for the movement from the community college to the university.

**Centrality.** The third element of social capital is centrality. Centrality is referring to how close the partner is to the decision making within the home institution, which gives them a higher level of social capital or within the partnership. The individual’s capabilities determine how he/she is looked to as a leader (Amey et al., 2010). Eddy (2010b) states that “centrality represents how close the person is to key decision makers in the organization” (p. 31). By being central in a network, a leader can communicate the vision for the goals of the organization directly with stakeholders and controls resources or decision-making on resources. The centrality of this individual, who is close to the center of a network, allows him/her to find various opportunities for advice and communication with stakeholders (Balkundi, Kilduff, & Harrison, 2011).

In a case where a high school, a community college, and a university were partnering to help with the transition from high school to higher education (Watson, 2007), the community college administrator who was central to this partnership saw his role as creating the vision. His motivation was simply to help students gain access to higher education. Watson (2007) stated that this champion was determined and optimistic about moving the partnership forward. This middle-level administrator at a satellite campus of a community college could easily have said no to the partnership. His middle level position at the community college limited his organizational capital. Despite this lack of organizational capital, he was able to develop strong social and
interpersonal connections. Even though this mid-level leader had very little authority in the college in terms of resources for the partnership, he was able to set the vision for the community colleges role in the partnership by developing a committee of department chairs, people he thought had the authority to garner support for the partnership. He was able to draw upon his work to build social capital to make him a central decision maker in the partnership (Watson, 2007).

**Feedback loops and trust.** The final elements of social capital examined in this chapter are feedback loops and trust. According to Eddy (2010b) the feedback loop represents the trust made through relationships with the champion. Dhillon (2007) states that leaders working in partnerships indicate that trust are characteristic of a successful partnership. The more trust there is the more social capital can be produced and used. Trust is a source of social capital and positioned in the relationships of people (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). There is a two way relationship between cooperation and trust. In a partnership cooperation brings about trust and more trust brings about cooperation. This leads to collective trust, where there is an expectation that partnership members can rely on interactions to solve partnership problems (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Social capital in the formation of a partnership is used to act on motivations. Social capital in partnerships is formed via density, information, centrality, feedback loop, and trust. Just as with relationships, the strategies of communication that are used by all parties in a partnership are critical to success (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). The following section discusses communication in the partnership context.
Communication

Communication allows partners to use a common language to understand motivations, goals, and benefits to all partners (Amey et al., 2010). Open communication supports the creation of partnership capital (Eddy, 2010b). The way people understand the goals of a partnership is connected to success; leaders must communicate clearly to partners and allow for the communication about the partnership to change as it develops (Amey, 2010). Organizational change often serves as the reason for the beginning of a partnership (Eddy, 2010b). If leaders communicate successfully, they can build commitment to the partnership and avoid resistance during organizational change (Elving, 2005). The communication during a partnership is internal and external. Here internal communication refers to communication within the community college or business, and external communication refers to communication between the community colleges and the businesses. The internal and external communication can be formal and informal. The bases for the distinction between formal and informal communication is whether it is official or unofficial (Price, 1997).

**Internal communication.** Internal support from the community college personnel is necessary for success in all new initiatives (Forde, 2002), including partnerships that are developed by workforce development offices. Leaders need to promote the successes through highlighting positive activities within the partnership, such as the promotion of a staff member in an organization newsletter. The communication practices that take place in a partnership are sometimes influenced by people in an institution but not directly involved in the partnership, which determine a partnership’s ultimate success. A conscious effort is required in constructing messages to
individuals, whether it is parents of students participating in the programs developed by the partnerships, the public at large, relevant boards, or business professionals (Amey, 2010). Communication is a crucial element in the formation of a partnership. The internal stakeholders at the college may have to make changes in their operational procedures in order to partner with external businesses; this is something that must change once the partnership is formed and while in progress. As change is often the reason for the beginnings of a partnership, communication regarding the change and the partnership as well as the information provided to the stakeholders is essential to success (Eddy, 2010b; Elving, 2005). Leaders in organizations need to support and communicate to employees so they are prepared for partnerships. Leaders must understand that commitment influences a staff’s willingness to change and participate in a partnership (Elving, 2005; Madsen, Miller, & John, 2005).

**External communication.** The communication between workforce development offices and businesses is vital to the progress in the formation of a partnership. Sharing information and listening are two communication components that support partnership formation (Eddy, 2010b). Clear and honest communication with partners may aid in clarifying goals, providing a context, and enhancing understanding of the partnership potential. Communicating with the potential partner about resources available can motivate the external organization to partner. However, partners must be careful to avoid inferring sole ownership of the partnership, which can suffocate the motivation of the external organization. The messages sent among partners must enhance the partnership in a way that the purpose of the partnership can be positively communicated and further build commitment (Amey, 2010).
**Formal communication.** Formal communication refers to “officially transmitted information” in organizations (Price, 1997, p. 349). This type of communication follows the chain of command and the purpose of it is to simplify a leader’s job. This communication format has been the traditional view for leaders and business communicators and is represented in the organizational hierarchy (Johnson et al., 1994). Formal communication in organizations is often distinguished by the direction of the channel in the hierarchy; that is downward, upward and horizontal (Guffey, 2013). The downward communication flows in a channel from decision makers to the employees. This includes the policies, procedures, goals and feedback in an organization. The next type of communication goes the opposite direction. Upward communication provides feedback from the subordinates to the leaders in the organization. The final direction of communication is horizontal; this is lateral communication in the hierarchy between peers, such as two workforce development practitioners that work together (Guffey, 2013).

**Informal communication.** Not only is there formal communication in organizations but there is also informal communication. Fay (2011) defined informal communication in organizations as “voluntary talk that does not have to be solely work or task focused” (p. 213). According to Litterst and Eyo (1982) informal communication comes from the personal interests of people rather than the formal requirements of their positions. Informal communication is based on the social relationships between people (Fay, 2011). This type of communication holds together relationships in the workplace, which serve to connect people. These informal interactions play a part in finding common ground and help people find meaningful relationships. In addition, the
relationships and interpersonal interactions that people have can have a positive influence on the work being completed (Fay, 2011). Informal communication helps to build cohesion among workgroups and provides an opportunity for needed social relationships. In addition, past research has shown informal communication to be more believable and reliable than formal communication (Crampton, Hodge, and Mishra, 1998).

**Summary.** This literature review illustrates that workforce development offices have a need to form partnerships with businesses. The partnership formation process was examined to include the antecedents, development, and sustaining processes. Social capital, one form of capital, is an element that can illustrate the process of formation of a partnership. Closely related to social capital is the idea of communication that happens during the formation of the partnership between internal stakeholders and well as external partners with formal and informal methods.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework below shows the formation of a successful partnership. This model includes the concepts from Figure 1 and Figure 2. The concepts in this conceptual framework are the focus areas of this study. The band at the top of the model illustrates the formation of a partnership including the development and sustainability of a partnership. The grey shades goes from light to dark illustrating the movement towards sustainability, which also includes the shift to obtaining partnership capital and the ability to achieve as a group what they were not able to do alone (Eddy, 2010b). In addition, this shading illustrates an overlap of concepts, in that there is no point where one begins and the other starts. Eddy (2010b) developed the Social Capital in Partnerships model that has the roles of density, centrality, information, trust, and the
feedback loop. In the figure, the arrows extending from the social capital are the strength of the relationships within the partnership so the bolder lines indicated stronger relationships whereas the thinner lines represent weaker relationships. The box labeled communication references the four types of communication that takes place during the formation of a partnership: internal, external, formal, and informal. Understanding social capital and communication can illustrate the use of concepts related to relationships in the formation of successful partnerships.
Figure 4. Conceptual Framework.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to understand the process of the formation of successful partnerships between workforce development offices at rural community colleges and businesses. Specifically, I focused on understanding motivation, social capital in partnerships, and the communication of the workforce development practitioners that occurs internally with stakeholders and externally with partners. This methodology chapter discusses the research questions, study methodology, case selection, participant selection, data (interviews, documents, and observations), data analysis, confirming case study findings, and rational for the analysis. The research questions pursued in this study:

1. How do workforce development offices form successful partnerships between rural community colleges and businesses?
   a. What role does motivation have in forming partnerships?
   b. What role does social capital (trust, centrality, information, density) play in forming the partnership?

2. What communication practices take place in the formation of a successful partnership?
   a. How do workforce development practitioners communicate the partnership internally?
   b. How do workforce development practitioners communicate externally with partners?
Study Methodology

This study seeks to deeply understand the formation of partnerships between workforce development offices at rural community colleges and their business partners, with an emphasis on motivation, social capital, and communication. A qualitative study design works to best answer the above research questions because as Marshall and Rossman (2006) argued, “[o]ne chooses a qualitative approach to understand phenomena from the participants perspective and to explore and to discover, in depth and in context, what may have been missed when studies were done with predetermined assumptions” (p. 77). This study of successful partnerships is emergent and flexible rather than tightly prefigured (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Merriam, 2009). In the qualitative tradition I completed two case studies. Case study research focuses “on an individual representative of a group (e.g.) school administrator, an organization or organizations, or phenomenon (e.g. particular event, situation, program, or activity)” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 15). Case study research places importance on explaining the focus of the research, which in this instance is the phenomenon of partnership formation. Completing a case study means investigating phenomena within a natural context using various sources of evidence, which are bound by space and time (Yin, 2009). In this study, the case is bound by the formation of a partnership (space) during a particular year (time) (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

The deep and varied sources of information that I collected allowed for an in-depth thick descriptive case study (Stake, 1995). Quotes, anecdotes, and narratives were used to illustrate the complexity of partnership formation and to create a mental picture
for the reader of the research (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Thick description was used to take the reader into the setting of the formation of the successful partnerships (Patton, 2002).

A descriptive and collective design was used for this research study to provide a holistic view of the workforce development offices’ involvement in the formation of successful partnerships (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). A collective case study is where at least two cases are described and compared in order to provide a description of the issue (Creswell, 2008; Yin, 2009). This study examined two partnerships between rural community colleges and business partners. Collective case study is intended to bring insight to an issue or focus on a generalization rather than concentrating on a particular case (Rudestam & Newton, 2007; Stake, 1995). The purpose of this study was not only to develop insight on the rural community colleges and businesses being researched, although these organizations may benefit from reading the study. The prime intention was to build insight on the role of relationships and communication in the formation of these successful partnerships.

There was authorization to conduct this study by the Institutional Review Board at Western Michigan University. The participation in this study was voluntary. All participants could stop taking part in the study at any time without any consequences. No participants opted out of the study. Pseudonyms were used throughout this research for all participants, community colleges, and businesses.

**Case selection.** With case study research the preferred method of selection is purposive (Creswell, 2007). There were two cases selected to examine how workforce development offices at rural community colleges developed successful partnerships with
businesses in Michigan. To date, very little research examines factors that lead to the success of rural community college partnerships. Multiple criteria helped in choosing the partnerships to be a part of this research. This study focused on community colleges in Michigan that are categorized as rural by the Carnegie Classification. Urban and suburban are categorized as having a population of more than 500,000 in areas designated as metropolitan by the U.S. Census. Rural community colleges are in metropolitan areas with lower populations or are not in metropolitan areas (Carnegie Classification, 2013). The Carnegie codes provide a view that is spatial, illustrating the area that rural community colleges service (Rural Community College Alliance, 2013). There are 28 community colleges in Michigan (Michigan Community College Association, 2014); 18 are classified as rural serving (Carnegie Classification, 2013).

Cejda (2007) indicated that the nation’s rural community colleges can also be further examined by their size. The size of the college is also important in the selection of the sites for this research. Cohen (2003) argued that college size should be the main criteria when categorizing community colleges. He indicated that college size is descriptive; each college fits into a category, is easily understood, and is nonjudgmental. In addition, the size of the college relates directly to other college characteristics, such as percentage of full and part time students, grants from government, and cost of instruction (Cohen, 2003). The five size categories for community colleges in the Carnegie Classification include very small (less than 500 students), small (from 500-1999), medium (2000-4,999), large (5000-9,999), and extra-large (more than 10,000). The classification for this study was medium sized rural community colleges in Michigan. There are seven community colleges in Michigan that are medium sized schools.
(Carnegie Classification, 2013). When the size of the school deviates from small to large there are certain challenges or advantages that are particular to these classifications, whereas medium community colleges do not fall within these deviations. For example, the largest community colleges are most likely to receive government grants and the smallest community colleges are least likely to receive government grants (Cohen, 2003). The medium sized community colleges offer cases that are most relatable to a variety of community colleges by not falling into the contrasting sides.

These medium sized rural community colleges are located in Michigan. Michigan was chosen to be the location in this study because of the recession and a slower recovery process than other states, and partnerships are important to the recovery process (Community College Times, 2011; Michigan Economic Growth, 2013). In July of 2013 the unemployment rate in Michigan was 8.8%, whereas the national average was 7.4% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). There is no current comparison for rural areas, but in 2011 the unemployment rate in Michigan was 10.3% where rural areas in Michigan had a 10.6% unemployment rate. In between 2007-2011, 25.3% of individuals ages 25 and older in Michigan completed college education, whereas in rural areas this number was 18.7%. Rural areas in Michigan also fell behind in pay, where the average income in a rural area was $31,445 and the average for the State was $36,264 (USDA, 2013).

The next sorting criterion was that the sites had a Michigan Technological Education Center (M-TEC). Of the 28 community colleges in Michigan, 16 of them have M-TECs, 5 of the 16 colleges are medium two-year colleges, and 3 of these colleges are rural serving-medium (Carnegie Classification, 2013; Cohen, 2003; Michigan Community College Association, 2014; Michigan Economic Development Corporation,
2013). All three colleges were invited to partake in the study and two of the colleges accepted the invitation. These two colleges are engaged in a range of partnerships.

Further, the partnerships that were examined in this research were successful. The definition of success by Russell and Flynn (2000) was used to pinpoint the successful partnerships. Recall, this listing includes:

- Is sustainable (i.e., partners wish to continue working together, sufficient resources can be generated to continue operations).
- Is viewed positively by all partners, which may be due to a variety of reasons, but would generally include the perception that the collaboration was useful and productive.
- Generates positive outcomes in accordance with the goals and purposes of the collaborative entity.
- Creates a means of open and equal communication and decision making.
- Provides an improved mechanism to achieve common purposes more readily (e.g., more efficiently, at reduced cost, with better quality) through partnership than alone. (p. 200)

The initial contacts at the community colleges were e-mailed the definition and I had further discussion with them on the phone to see if one of their institutional partnerships met the criteria for this study. The concept of a successful partnership was only utilized in selecting the cases in this study. The partnerships were only described as being successful by the initial contacts, who were involved in the case selection process, not by the other participants. The idea of a successful partnership is subjective and cannot be carried over to indicate that these partnerships hold the quality of success. In the next
section the process of using the definition of successful partnership in the case and participant selection is described in detail.

The first partnership examined, between Greenridge Community College and Just Right Manufacturing, was intended to be one that started because of grant funding as indicated by the initial contact at the college, although during the interview participants indicated that the partnership began because of a relationship. The beginnings of a formal process such as a grant often rely on trust a form of social capital to sustain the partnership (Ozaki et al., 2007). The second partnership, between Treetops Community College and Electrical Incorporated, began because of a relationship as indicated by the initial contact at the college and by the participant’s interviews. A relationship can often serve as the beginning of a partnership (Ozaki et al., 2007). Amey et al. (2010) stated that partnerships come together and sustain for different reasons, which sees the interplay of motivation and social capital.

The first partnership involved Greenridge Community College and Just Right Manufacturing. This college has a student population of nearly 4,800, which classifies it as a medium sized school (Carnegie Classification, 2013). This college is located in rural area in Michigan; this college also has the Greenridge Technical Center on their main campus. Greenridge Community College was able to obtain a grant in which many partnerships are involved. The development of many of the partnerships existed before the grant was established.

The second partnership is between Treetops Community College and Electrical Incorporated. Treetops Community College has a student population of nearly 4,700, which also classifies it as a medium sized school. This college is a rural serving
The Treetops Technical Center was able to build the partnerships through relationships.

**Participant selection.** For the two cases, participants were interviewed, events observed, and documents examined. The workforce development practitioners, workforce development instructors, college leaders (i.e. President of the College, Deans), and business partners were interviewed at campuses or businesses used in the case studies. The initial contacts were the workforce development directors at the site colleges. These contacts were e-mailed the definition of successful partnerships and they were invited and accepted to have a phone conversation regarding partnerships that might fulfill these requirements best. The initial invitation can be seen in Appendix A. During the first phone call, there was a discussion to see if they are in partnerships that fit within this definition and how the partnership involved a grant or started by a relationship. There were partnerships that fit within the selection criteria and the workforce development practitioners were invited to take part in the research. Also, they were asked during the phone call if there are others that are part of the successful partnership to be invited to be interviewed. These individuals were invited to take part in the study. The invitation for others who are involved in the partnership (including business partners) can be seen in Appendix A as well.

Snowball sampling was used from that point on. Snowball sampling is a form of purposeful sampling whereby the researcher asks participants to recommend other individuals to study (Creswell, 2008). I asked each participant to recommend others to interview, observations to attend, and documents to examine. This method of selection for the participants was on a first come first serve basis, until participants involved in the
process were found, with broad-based participation cast over the process. So, for example, I assured that not only community college participants were interviewed but also business partners.

**Data**

Case study research entails examining phenomenon within a context with multiple sources of data to provide thick description (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). These data collected from these methods are from two community colleges and their corresponding businesses. Data were collected from interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). The data sources are presented in Appendix B.

**Interviews.** The main data collection method for this study was interviews. The research questions were addressed through individual interviews which glean words from participants to provide thick description (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Interviewing participants at two separate rural community colleges provided insight regarding the process and by example may help similar institutions that are developing partnerships. The interviews took place at the community college or business where the participant is employed. The interview guide can be found in Appendix C. Professionals at this level are very busy, so conducting the interviews in a private and distraction free location was important. This location hopefully increased the comfort of the interviewee to obtain high quality information (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Prior to recording the interview, permission from the participants through a written consent was obtained. The consent form can be found in Appendix D. The consent form was stored in a locked cabinet. Following the interview, the audio recording was transcribed verbatim for closer inspection of the data (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The participants were e-mailed the
transcripts to solicit feedback, at this time they could edit their transcripts to better capture their point of view (Merriam, 2009). There were no changes made by participants, but they did help to decipher inaudible audio. The recordings and transcripts had no distinguishing marks related to the interviewee, giving the interviewee confidentiality. The recordings and transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet. The notes I took during the interview enhanced the audio by recording the visible reactions of the participants during the interview (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are well suited for case study research because questions are predetermined and flexible; the answers provide possible answers to the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews ask follow up questions to be able to probe more deeply into issues related to the formation of successful partnerships (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

**Documents.** The second method of data collection is mining of data from documents (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). This source of data combined with interviews and observations helps provide comprehensive information from multiple sources, for example, if a Workforce Development Dean does not give a speech on a new partnership, but instead decides to e-mail the changes to the department chairs or faculty then documents become valuable to answering the research questions. I gathered information from as many documents as possible, from both private and public sources (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). I gathered public brochures and I asked for other documents while on location for interviews and examine relevant web pages.

**Observations.** A common form of data collection in case studies that may be utilized in this study is observations. I attempted to observe pubic and small group
sessions in which the partnership is discussed. Observations were able to take place during the time of the interviews; they took place where the activity naturally occurs (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). An observation guide includes the time, date, location of the observation, and the name and the position of the individuals involved. The specific actions that are related to the formation of partnerships were observed and documented. Field notes were developed in as much detail as possible to form a database, which includes description and observer comments (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

Case study research using multiple forms of data is a recursive process; data are collected and analyzed simultaneously. A central idea within case study research is that summarizing and interpreting information as the foundation for understanding the topic (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). I concurrently interpreted and summarized information throughout the research and writing process.

Two stages of analysis. There are two stages of analysis in collective case study, the within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009). The analysis was done by hand, not with software. The within-case analysis, which examines only one community college at a time consisted of coding in which I individually read through the interview transcripts, observations notes, and notes from the documents. A pen was used to mark possible ideas of importance in the margins. The conceptual framework on page 40 was used for coding (Creswell, 2009). Codes that were used in this study were development, sustainability, motivation, social capital, and communication. On the second read through of the transcripts, patterns were color-coded and I used post it notes
to group ideas that seem to go together (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) likened this process to having a conversation with the data.

The next stage is analytic coding in which I grouped the codes that appear to go together (Merriam, 2009). A running list of the groupings stayed attached to the transcripts. Continuing to the next set of data, the list of groupings from the previous data was used to see if they were present in the second set. The two lists were compared; the two lists were then merged (Merriam, 2009). This continued until the point of saturation, a point at which recurring patterns encompass all the data, and no new information and insights are identifiable (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The within-case analysis that was employed during the initial analysis was replicated in the cross-case analysis. The within-case analysis and cross-case analysis are similar; the difference is that there is a cohesive description across the two community colleges in the cross-case analysis. These patterns become themes in which subsequent items were sorted; some of the themes became subthemes. Once this happened and themes were derived from the data, then the data could be searched again for more robust examples and revisions of the themes happened during this process. Finally, more general themes were identified; there are themes that crossed the data that relate to the conceptual framework. The themes from the interviews, documents, and observations were explained and grouped together to compare and categorize data (Merriam, 2009). These themes are examined in depth in the next chapter.
Confirming case study findings. Confirming case study findings was the next step of the analysis process (Merriam, 2009). I had the report reviewed by case study researchers who are familiar with case study research, in order to point out discrepancies in the research. The next strategy I used to confirm results used the triangulation of multiple sources. The findings from the study based on interviews, observations, and documents is more convincing than data just collected form one method (Yin, 2009). For example, what may be said in the interviews with the workforce development practitioners can be checked against what happens in an observation, there are multiple interpretations and meanings and the view of the workforce development practitioner is different from the business people, but both are valid (Merriam, 2009). I related my findings to those of other researchers who examined partnership formation, community colleges, social capital, and communication to build confidence on the research results (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

Summary

The qualitative methods of the collective case study design address the research questions stemming from the problem of failing partnerships. This analysis explores the relationships and communication practices that take place during the formation of partnerships between workforce development offices at community colleges and businesses. This collective case study examines partnerships and the interplay of motivation, social capital, and communication. The qualitative data from interviews, documents, and observations went through the two stages of analysis to offer a picture of the partnerships. The results from this study can be applied to partnership theory as well as practice for leaders at community colleges.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

This research seeks to understand the process of the formation of successful partnerships between workforce development offices at rural community colleges and businesses with an attention to motivation, social capital, and the communication that occurs within and between these groups. The workforce development offices in Michigan are referred to as technical centers and this is the way they will be referenced throughout the rest of this research. Chapter 4 explores the formation of partnerships at technical centers in Michigan located at Greenridge Community College and Treetops Community College. Each site partnered, respectively, with the businesses Just Right Manufacturing and Electrical Incorporated. The names of the colleges, businesses, cities, counties, and all of the study participants are pseudonyms designed to protect the identities of the participants.

The findings emerged from data collected by conducting interviews, reviewing selected documents, and researcher observations at each research site. The two community colleges are both mid-sized institutions serving rural areas and are located in Michigan. Since the initial contacts at both research sites voiced that the partnerships to be examined were successful, I could analyze partner formation based on motivation, social capital, and communication.

The two cases are broken into two different sections of analysis. The first section provides a description of the Greenridge Technical Center, the participants, the grant or the relationship at the start of the partnership, and the partnership dynamics. The second
section discusses the five themes that emerged from the study: motivation, the relationships, trust, information and understanding, and communication.

**Greenridge Community College Case**

In the late 1960s, Greenridge Community College began offering classes to around 200 students; over the last 45 years the institution has grown to serve approximately 6,000 students per year. Greenridge Community College has over 50 programs, including transfer and career programs. This college serves three counties in a rural area. There are two campuses at Greenridge Community College, a main campus and a secondary campus. The main campus is located in a town where the population is 2,114 (Census, 2014). This college is in a very rural area where there was no other visible businesses surrounding the college. The unemployment rate in this county is 13.0% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

Located in another county, the secondary campus is in a town that is close to 30 miles away from the main campus in a town with a population of 26,185 (Census, 2014). This campus of the community college is also located in a town where there is a larger four-year university with enrollment of 27,247 (Carnegie Classification, 2013). The unemployment rate is 8.4% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

**Greenridge technical center.** The college completed the building of the Greenridge Technical Center to offer job training in the early 2000s. The technical center is located on the main campus. The center offers training in areas such as carpentry, electrical, robotics, plumbing, masonry, and wind technology. Economic development for the community is also a part of the center’s focus. As with other technical centers, the Greenridge Technical Center offers customizable training and professional development.
A few of the courses offered include computer training, truck driving training, and seminar planning. The marketing efforts of the technical center include documents that provide information on how the college can potentially help businesses. Suggested ideas include providing internships for students with local businesses, creating and hosting workshops, creating customizable training, offering cooperative student projects, business marketing, fostering job connections, providing funding, and short term training. The short term training certificates listed in pamphlet at the technical center are in Welding, CNC, and Wind Technology.

The participants. Six individuals participated in the first case study; five of the participants are employed at Greenridge Community College and one participant is employed by Just Right Manufacturing. Most of the participants were interviewed in an office that I was allowed to use during my visit. Illene, the President of Greenridge, was not in the original round of interviews at the technical center, she was interviewed at a later date before a presentation she was giving at a university. The list of the participants below details the organization they represent, and their title within the organization.

Table 1

Participants in Greenridge Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greenridge Community College</th>
<th>Illene</th>
<th>College President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greenridge Technical Center</td>
<td>Harold</td>
<td>Director of the Technical Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>Wind Grant Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theo</td>
<td>Director of Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marlene</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Right Manufacturing</td>
<td>Jessie</td>
<td>General Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Illene and Jessie are the only two participants that do not work in the technical center. Illene was interviewed because she was mentioned by other participants as being
an important person in the formation of the partnership between the technical center and Just Right Manufacturing. Marlene was not able to answer a majority of the interview questions, so her interview was used to corroborate findings in only one area. In the technical center, Justin and Theo have offices that are located just right of the entrance of the building; their offices are connected by an open door. Marlene sits at a large receptionist counter just outside of the offices of Justin and Theo. These three are all very close and have the ability to talk to each other through doorways connecting their workspaces. Harold’s office is located a bit further back from the receptionist desk, however, he remained very mobile throughout the building.

This college is in a rural area and the relationships of the participants are built into the community. When comparing this case to the Treetops case this institution is more rural. For instance, the participants from the Greenridge case are in proximity to one another and are recognized by the members of the community when they are in public. The participants described their positions and relationships within the rural community and how it affected their ability to form partnerships. Illene is not from the area but she is from another small town and as the President of the College she gained the respect of the participants from the technical center. Harold voiced his respect for Illene. He grew up in the area and had been described by participants as having a lot of respect from the community, allowing him to build strong relationships with business owners in the region. Theo is from the area is well and has not been in the field as long as Harold, but was able to build very strong relationships with those around him. Justin not being from the area was guarded and helped by Harold and Theo and was given advice about the area and how to go about maintaining relationships. One piece of advice that Justin received
was that the community was very small and that he needed to be careful about what he said because rumors will spread very quickly throughout the community. These individuals were very scattered during my day on campus; they were preparing to go to Washington D.C. to a conference that revolved around a wind technology grant. Jessie is on the board for the technical center and has built relationships with all of the individuals who work in the building, including spending free time with them outside of work.

The grant. The Greenridge Technical Center received a $700,000 grant spanning 3 years (2012-2015) for support of a Wind Technology program. On a grant update brochure that goes to all people involved in the grant, the literature indicated that the first equipment was received to train in wind technology. The immediate goal is to train students for work in a manufacturing company. However, a ladder approach to continuing education is included in the program. A student can first enter the short term non-credit program and then continue into the Associate’s Degree program. Students can then transfer their credits to a local university and continue towards earning a Bachelor’s Degree in Wind Technology. The funding for the program is used to develop curriculum, equipment for training, and the salary for the Grant Coordinator.

The partnership. The partnership analyzed here is between the Greenridge Technical Center and Just Right Manufacturing revolving around the previously mentioned grant. I had a phone call with Harold, who indicated that this was a successful partnership. Just Right Manufacturing is not part of the Wind industry, but their partnership with the technical center helps with the grant. Harold mentioned that there is a welding program which is non-credit based through the grant that a company needed to hire individuals in this area and the company agreed. Theo stated that, “Jessie works for
Just Right Manufacturing, she doesn’t necessarily build Wind parts, but what does she do? She sells steel and different parts—or—and different materials to companies that might produce Wind parts.” The grant, although around Wind, has produced a six week certificate in welding that is in operation because Just Right Manufacturing produces machines for the Wind industry.

**Themes: Greenridge Technical Center**

Five themes emerged from the analysis of interviews, documents, and observation through analysis that used codes connected to the conceptual framework. These five themes are: (a) motivation, (b) the relationships, (c) trust, (d) information and understanding, and (e) communication. These data were triangulated from each of the sources (interviews, observations, and documents) to determine these themes and the subthemes.

**Motivation.** Motivation to create a partnership appeared prevalently in the case study. The motivation of the college and the business is an adhesive that holds two institutions together. It is also a reason that the partnership initially began and why it continues today. Participants recognized both the college and the business needs for the partnership to be successful. The motivation in the partnership entails the mission and vision of the college (which includes the history as motivation and motivation of helping the community), growing and keeping talent in the community, resources as motivation, and alignment of missions.
Mission and vision of the college. In the partnership, Greenridge Community College’s mission and vision embody motivations appearing in the formation of this partnership. As described on their website, the Greenridge Community College mission is to help the community become successful on a global scale. Their vision is very eloquent in explaining their dedication to the community and partnerships, where the community college connects with partners for the success of the region. All of the participants from Greenridge Community College who were interviewed mentioned the mission or vision of the college or what is contained in these statements describing individual motivation for partnering with community businesses. The next two sections, history as motivation and motivation of helping the community, describe these motivations.

History as motivation. The history of the colleges’ mission has played a part in the motivations to partner with businesses. Justin and Harold mentioned that this motivation has been a part of the mission since the beginnings of the college. Justin stated that it, “goes back to the 60’s [and] why [the college] was started. It was actually a trade and tech school […] to support businesses, a group or employers go together with the college and they discussed their needs.” The founders’ of the college created a mission to help the community and the businesses in the area and grounded the institution into technical areas. Harold also stated that, “the college has a long tradition, since 196[9], [in] its founding of working with business and industry.” This historical trend of the mission of the community college helping out businesses carried into the present years.
Motivation of helping community. The motivation of helping the community is a central tenant of community colleges, which is also explicitly stated in the vision of the college. Illene, the President of Greenridge Community College explained, “I think the motivation on our part is simply that it’s the community in community college.” Harold indicated that the motivation “has to be in your DNA, to some extent. It has to be within the mission of the institution.” These sentiments illustrate the mission and vision as motivation as a driving force in the success of a partnership. The motivation of helping the community from the side of the community college was a theme that emerged from the interviews and documents.

On the business side, Jessie from Just Right Manufacturing talked about her organization’s motivation. There was not an indication in the interview that Jessie was motivated by Just Right's mission or vision, but she did indicate that “we’re compelled by our corporate offices to become intimately involved with our community colleges.” The business and technical center both had the support of their organizations to create a partnership.

Growing and keeping talent in the community. Growing and keeping talent is another subtheme expressed by interview participants. It was also expressed as a need in the pamphlets that the technical center published. The aim of the Wind Technology program is to supply local manufacturers with more skilled employees while also creating careers for people in the community. The need for local, community talent motivates businesses to enter into partnerships, thereby motivating the college to move forward with the partnership. Theo stated, “[w]hat [businesses] really needed [are] people that [have] some sort of background in wind, and there just [isn’t] anyone in the area.”
explained further that talent in the area is what the community is “talking about.”

According to Theo, this is the “number one” motivating factor for groups involved in the partnership.

The local talent is a motivation for the technical center, Illene indicated that, “we have positioned ourselves well to be a resource of talent development, and, you know, they naturally look to us and say, can you help us with these issues?” The college created these programs to develop the talent for community organizations. The ability to find workers capable of filling low skill positions is plentiful, but the ability to hire workers skilled in a trade [i.e. welding] is a luxury. Justin discussed the ease and difficulty in filling specific positions:

[Lincoln] County's population [and] [Cicely] County's population is aging considerably; not too many people in the pipeline to fill the high skill jobs. We can find an operator to run a press, I don't care where you're at, you can find an operator to run a press. They can't find skilled tradesman, they can't find machinists, they can't find CNC operators, they can't find technicians to set up the machines, they can't find mold makers, die makers, you know, materials folks. The goal of the technical center is to meet the needs of their community businesses.

Harold explained the motivation from the businesses and the centers perspective:

Do you have that main resource, that main fuel that's going to make my business run or be profitable, and that's people with an expertise in this arena. So our goal is to try and fuel that fire by building that resource so that these companies can grow. That’s our goal.
The college has created short-term entry level programs allowing for transition into higher level, university programs. These trained individual are then sought after by businesses in this rural community. Jessie explained that the trained employees are what she is looking for:

From a selfish standpoint, I need good employees, and the labor pool is dried up, and I train my own employees, I mean, I get them right out of high school sometimes. If you want to come to work, I'll teach you how to do the job, but, you know, when you get up to a higher level, supervision, and CNC, and machinist and things like that, it's really hard to start somebody out of school and then send them to school to be a machinist and then I still have get the work out, so the relationship with the college, you know, I'm selfish.

Jessie was able to point to her organization’s need to have trained employees. She indicated that her organization can train for positions that are not technical. She further explained that other positions require a higher level of skill and necessitate college.

The technical center is not only motivated to keep trained workers local but they are also interested in recruiting new workers to the area, which has been very difficult. Justin stated that, “it’s pretty difficult to get on that list to entice a student to come to [Lincoln] County, or come to [Thornville], or come to [Cicely] County, come to [Duma] County, when students are getting offers from [a larger wind company in a urban area].”

With business competition increasing the difficulty of recruiting skilled workers, there is still a hope that businesses in Lincoln and Cicely counties can promote the area as providing skilled laborers and talent for the wind industry. Harold indicated that the
programs and businesses are motivated to increase their reputation so trained individuals consider careers in Lincoln and Cicely Counties:

So, when the State is out selling, recruiting, we are hopeful that we will be on the radar as a cluster that’s meaningful, so if they talk to a [wind] company, and they say, yeah, there are some clusters in Michigan and here they are, and here’s what they are doing in that area to, to meet the talent needs.

The college is working hard to present itself as a place local manufacturing businesses can look to for their training needs.

All interview participants agree that talent in the form of skilled laborers is as a main motivator for businesses to partner with the technical center. In turn, the technical center is motivated to keep skilled laborers in the area and provide technical training to community members, so the wind industry can flourish. In this way, the technical center is trying to both train and bring in new talent in order to enhance and stabilize the local counties and decrease the amount of local poverty. Ultimately, the technical center’s goal is to help businesses in the community to help improve the region’s economic development.

**Resources as motivation.** The region that Greenridge Technical Center is located in is an area with economic challenges. Illene and Harold both discussed that there are economic difficulties in this region. When Illene spoke about the region and the college, she stated:

I think a lot of times we don’t have the resources. You, know, we are a very under revenued community college, we’re one of the lowest per pupil , per
student, and so it’s sort of just in the DNA of people in rural settings to say, “How can we get this done? We don’t have the resources.”

Harold agreed that there are limited resources in the area, when he expressed:

We’re poverty ridden—we’re generally one of the highest poverty counties—that we serve, two of them—[Cicely] and [Lincoln] Counties—are at the top, or the bottom if you will, and a lot of not-so-glamorous statistics, poverty being one of them, unemployment being another, median income and home—household income being a third, and the list goes on, educational attainment, lots of bad statistics.

Illene and Harold both agreed that the area where the college is located has issues of poverty. There are manufacturing careers in the regions that are connected to the training from the technical center. The region where Greenridge Technical Center is located is an area of poverty, but wind industry careers are in high demand.

The Greenridge Technical Center is motivated by the physical materials local businesses bring to the partnership. The college does not have the materials necessary for training students, but they acquired these materials through the partnership. Just Right Manufacturing is willing to provide materials in trade for human talent. As such, providing materials for training is really a strategic investment for Just Right Manufacturing, and the technical center obtains materials it would not normally have easy access to. For example, Just Right Manufacturing provides the technical centers training program with steel. Jessie highlighted her contribution to the program by stating “I’m providing raw materials and raw steel for [students] to practice welding.” Justin explained the process of obtaining the steel from Jessie for the students to train on:
How do I get steel? I need a donation? She said, what do you need? I said I have no idea, you know, I – I don't weld, you know, frankly, I don't know what they're going to need, I don't know what they're doing, and she said, all right, no problem, and that was it. Next thing I know, she delivers it in her car, bags of steel, they have these big – all the end cuts, rough cuts, pieces–all different types of steel and they continued to deliver, once a week for the entire six weeks [the length of the training program], bags and bags and boxes of steel.

The material to train students motivates the technical center that is in a rural area that has economic challenges; they would not be able to offer the training without these supplies.

Alignment of motivations. The technical center is motivated to align their motivations with others through their mission to help the community. For example, a technical center marketing pamphlet distributed to businesses states that “we pride ourselves on customizing our services and opportunities for each business partner.” The motivations for the college and the business are not identical. Despite this difference in motivations, each organization is motivated to be a part of the partnership. The college and the business fulfill motivations that they are not able to complete on their own without the partnership. The participants involved in the partnership understand their specific motivation and how this connects to the motivation of the other organization. Members of Greenridge Technical Center and Just Right Manufacturing expressed that the motivations aligned in this collaboration to work well for both organizations. The technical center adapts with businesses because of the overall mission of the college to help the community. The alignment is a motivation that is vital to the development and sustaining of the partnership.
In terms of this partnership, Jessie stated that “it is a win-win, as far as I am concerned” and “their mission is almost congruous with our mission.” The alignment of the missions was recognized to be important by both sides of the partnership. Illene explained that alignment of the two organizations is a motivation for partnership:

It has to align with everybody's needs. In our case, it aligned very well with our mission. We had personnel in place; we had a knowledge base that we knew we could really do something to help, to be of assistance, that's what we're there for, and so that alignment is very important.

The alignment of organizational motivations and missions encourages members to take part in the partnership. Since the college already had organizational systems conducive to community outreach, they were able to maximize their resources in forming the partnership with Just Right Manufacturing.

The relationships. The relationships in this partnership emerged as a theme. During the formation of a partnership, relationships in a rural location are described in comparison to relationships in urban areas. This rural partnership is shown to begin informally. Friendship and mutual respect are described by participants as being important to the formation of the partnerships between the college and the businesses in the rural area. The technical center and Just Right Manufacturing represent this rural trend in the origination of their partnership.

Rural community colleges and relationships. Interviewees discussed the difference between forming partnerships in rural areas versus urban areas. Illene stated that when she attended presentations on how others have built partnerships, urban schools “spend 45 minutes of their presentation explaining how they got people all on board to
get together; it was all about this process and trying to reach out, and break through this barrier.” She went on to explain that when people from rural schools present, “they spend about 5 minutes on how you got people together because, that’s just what you do, you know, we do that pretty quickly.” The time frame for forming relationships in an urban area is different than in a rural area. Relationships are a part of the rural area, whereas they might take more time to build in urban areas. Justin explained his experience working in a more urban area:

When I was in Southeast Michigan working with some of the larger automotive companies, you may never once ever see the person that you have to deal with. You could be working with each other for 10 years, never once see each other. That doesn't happen here.

The partnerships in this rural area rely on the personal connections. The participants in this study knew each other before the partnership began and all of them are from the rural area.

**Being from the area.** The people who are involved in the partnership from the business end all grew up in the rural area. Harold discussed how important it is to be from the community in order to be a manufacturer that is a part of this partnership: “I grew up here, and I can tell you there’s several manufacturers, not one of them came from somewhere else.” Justin explained the process of how the community of manufacturers grew in the area: “they’re just bred from a plant, and then they go out and start their own [business].” These companies have stayed in the rural area. Illene described the original company in the area and the companies that branched off:
We are so very rural, but as you begin to look around [Lincoln] and [Thornville], in [Lincoln] County, you begin to see all of those companies that are really offshoots from [Large Company] in a way. Since all of these companies stemmed off of each other and have stayed in the area, the workers and owners all know each other. This is a resource utilized in the partnership simply because if you did not grow up in the area, it is more difficult to become a part of that particular partnership.

**Personal relationships and mutual respect.** Relationships are not just formal in the formation of successful rural partnerships. The process of business can happen anywhere in the community. The location where a partnership begins is very flexible. Illene described how a relationship may begin in a rural area:

I’m sure that more than one deal or one beginning partnership has been struck at the –on the bleachers of a football game, you know, or at a local restaurant, wherever, and people just strike up a conversation and next thing you know, you’re helping each other […] achieve a goal.

Many of the people in the partnership are friends. Harold stated, “a lot of them are personal friends, and lot of them are friends of the college, and lot of them –not a lot, a few of them, were first time introductees to the college as a result of this process.” There are multiple places where people may see each other in the community. Justin stated that “So, they all know each other, they all sit on the same committees, in many cases they all go to the same churches, belong to the same Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs.” With that being said, the individuals may not be friends in every situation. When asked if people in the partnership were friends, Theo stated:
I don’t know if I’d use friends, but everyone’s civil enough where, you know sometime –90% of the time they see each other as competitors, they probably won’t get along, they’re willing to get along for the sake of this project because they see a need for it.

Illene indicated that, when forming a partnership, respect for one another is more important than being friends:

I think above the notion of friendship though –and that’s –that’s important because you want to be around people that you enjoy and genuinely like, but even more importantly I think it is to be persons who have mutual respect for each other and what they’re trying to accomplish.

The relationships, individuals and businesses local to the counties, personal relationships, and mutual respect are all elements that emerged in comparing rural to urban partnerships. In turn, these are all relationship elements utilized during the formation of the partnership between the technical center and Just Right Manufacturing.

**Trust.** Since its inception, the college has continued to build trust within the community, and trust is essential to the formation of partnerships. The technical center has used the trust to bring people into the partnership. This trust manifests both internally within the college and between the technical center and the partnering businesses. Trust is a recursive process in this partnership, where it builds upon itself and increases relationships and information while also obtaining resources such as materials. Harold stated:

We used a long-standing tradition that the college had been involved in the community and workforce and economic development forever, and we were able
to build on that trust that, you know, we have through this development as well to bring people around the table.

Trust was used in this partnership internally within the college and externally with Just Right Manufacturing.

**Internal trust.** The relationships internally within the community college and externally with the Just Right Manufacturing require trust. Internal trust is illustrated in the relationship between Illene and Harold. This trust is important because it directs the partnership from the college side. Illene explained the trust in the relationship with Harold:

I mean, he had to really and truly know that this was, in truth, what business and industry was saying and—and he wouldn't have had that capability had he not had his long background in manufacturing to really go out and be able to identify it and say, I see what you mean, and—and they believed in him. So, my relationship with Harold had to be one of trust; his with me had to be one that, yes, we're going down the right direction in tandem.

The president, Illene, trusts Harold to be able to direct the partnership. This trust is very important because he is central to the partnership.

**External trust.** It is also important that the external partners trust the individuals in the college. Jessie said that she trusts Harold. This trust has to go both ways. Illene stated that, “we both have to trust that we both are committed to this, that it's not a whim of the day, that it's a long-term commitment.” Trust helps to build relationships, information, and aids in acquiring materials. Justin explained how trust is important in the acquisition of materials:
And it was just that phone call and it was that–that trust factor of–and the partners want to see it work, you know. She could have–she could have charged me for all of it, she just said, nope, I'll start collecting and bring it right over and if you don't have the trust, you don't get that kind of response.

The external trust between organizations is important to the formation of this partnership. It allows both organizations to know that there is mutual commitment to pursue the partnership. Further, the trust also allowed the technical center to receive materials that they would not have otherwise received if it was not for the partnership.

Information and understanding. Information gained from the partnership increases motivation among participants to achieve mutual goals. It can be gained internally in an individual’s own organization or externally with the business partners. Internally, Illene explained that because of Harold’s position in the partnership, she relies on him for information:

I rely on Harold very much to tell me, you need to be at this meeting, or not, this meeting, we're okay with, because I have a couple of other things I do when I'm not doing this, and, you know, I really rely on every one of my – my folks, but, you know, Harold in particular.

Theo explained that through information, organizations are able to understand if the alignment is conducive to building the partnership:

If one company responds saying, we need two welders, we’re like, we’re not going to develop a program for two welders, but if we’re able to gather information from all of our partners and really find out what the need is, we find out today our partner could hire 240 welders, we need to do something about this
so that way they can get what they need, then that information makes it viable to run.

Jessie stated that the technical center is trying to actively gain information on what the partners need when she stated, “they're [technical center] always polling the community, what's going on, where are you struggling, what do you need, you know, and I know, in this industry, their industry, it's not like you can flip a switch and go.” Gaining information has allowed the technical center to build long term partnerships and form certificate and degree programs for the Wind industry. Illene also said that the technical center seeks feedback from partners. She stated:

We're asking them to be an alliance, to inform us, to review curriculum, to – to spell out what the competency should be, and so, you know, if we're going to ask that much of them and they're going to write a letter of support saying they're going to do that.

The information the technical center employees gathered was used to create a short-term certificate programs as well as the degree programs. Without fresh information, the technical center would not know what businesses would consider most useful.

In addition to the information gathered from manufacturers, information gathered internally by members of the college also determines the direction of the partnership. The college developed the training programs that were used to train individuals to help the wind industry based off of information gained from the partnerships.

The technical center needed to understand what the businesses were looking for before they put energy into developing training programs. The business also needed to understand the college, and what they are capable of delivering. Theo claimed that
understanding what is needed “[…] is to bring in industry and manufacturing partners and kind of get their feedback on what we’re working on to make sure it’s – you know, it’s what’s needed.” Illene also said that understanding is a big part of the partnership picture in terms of using relationships as resources. She stated that it is important that the people on the other side of the partnership feel understood:

I loved it when we would be in meetings with business and industry, and everybody around the table would be saying, oh, we know Harold, oh, yeah, Harold, and they said it not with just we know him, but it's like, we know him, he's one of us, he understands what we're saying, he listens to us, we don't have to re-explain things, he gets it, and– and he's always said one thing he liked about working with me was that I got it, and part of that comes from my background.

To form a partnership, it is vital the college understands the information businesses provide. Justin stated:

You need understanding, and it goes both ways. You have to understand what the company's really looking for, root cause analysis, kind of drilling down to find out what are you really saying, and understanding– going the other way, understanding our limitations as an institution. As an example, some manufacturers have a very specific product line or technique could be real expensive for us to teach every one of these techniques in our program, so it's getting them to understand, listen, we'll give the foundation skills, you take it to the next level.

Interview participants expressed that understanding comes from the partnership, and how this interplays in the partnership.
Communication. Communication is the fifth theme in creating a partnership. Additionally, there are four sub-themes of communication uncovered through the process of analysis of the data. In the process of communication each individual is trying to send a message to the other partners. Communication from the technical center is sent to partners through face-to-face and written communication. Listening is also an important aspect of communication in the formation of the partnership.

The message being sent. Interview participants described the message that the technical center intends to get across to businesses. According to interviewees, the message the technical center promotes to businesses ties together ideas of information, understanding, feedback, and listening. The message of the college is unified in the technical center’s message; they are trying to gain information to be able to serve the businesses in the community. Harold indicated that the messaging has a lot to do with listening to the needs of the community. Harold explained the technical center message:

We needed to be listening to what the needs are. Once we identified those needs, we took the opportunity to develop those needs into meaningful curriculum, and then ultimately into a meaningful deliverable, that means employees who are qualified can knock on the door, help that company grow, and help the local economy grow, and the State of Michigan grow, and the nation grow.

In further explaining the importance of messaging, Illene described Harold’s messaging to businesses:

I think [Harold’s] key messaging is that we are your resource, tell us how we can help. We believe in the college as an essential part of economic development, and our way of doing that is to ensure a talented workforce, and to make sure that all
of those businesses succeed that are currently there, and that new businesses see us as a place to provide for their workforce needs, so it was we are your resource, how can you use us, is his key message.

The other individuals in the technical center, along with Harold and Illene, have sent similar messages in an effort to gain information. According to Jessie, the message that the technical center sends involves the “need for knowledge and communication about what we want, what we need.” Theo reinforced the idea that all partnership participants communicated this same message:

I would say that the overarching theme is that we're here for them, that the whole point of this is to get them what they need, so we need to find out from them what they need so we can develop a curriculum, or training, or programs, or workshop, whatever it is, that's going to fit those needs that they've expressed to us, so I would –I would definitely say kind of the overarching theme.

By finding out what they need, the technical center is able to build a curriculum relevant to the development of employees.

The technical center is unified on communicating to businesses that they are there to help. The overall message is to gain information from the businesses. The technical center achieves this goal through face-to-face and written communication.

**Face to face communication.** Face-to-face communication is pivotal in the formation of a partnership. Face-to-face is important and does take precedence at the beginning of this partnership. Theo stated that “in person, face-to-face, is really vital in the first step.” Theo further explained the face-to-face and the importance of this type of communication:
Face-to-face when you are building it, that’s definitely vital, especially for me because I’m a person that I’ve got to see, you know, oh when you’re talking about that company, I need a person that I can envision that I am going to talk to, so in follow-up you know who you’re talking to. You kind of get to know a person’s personality better, how they deal with things better when you are talking face-to-face, you can see those hands –those faces what they’re kind of really thinking when you’re talking about.

Face-to-face communication resonated with other interview participants as well. Being in a rural area, face-to-face communication is perceived to be the best method of communication. Justin stated, “that informal face-to-face seems to work the best in the rural areas.” In rural areas, communication regarding partnerships often happens in informal settings. Justin further explained:

   I’d say the bulk of the communication that comes through with this grant and with this partnership is in an informal nature, people seeing [Harold] on the golf course, or outings, and functions; people seeing [Illene], seeing me, seeing [Theo].

Jessie provided evidence of communication in informal settings as well: “in the summer, we communicate on the golf course, and take business after-hours and over a glass of wine.” Justin explained, “whether you're sitting at the tavern, grocery store, meetings happen anywhere, be flexible enough to handle it, and flexible enough to handle their schedules.” Justin indicated that the formal communication does not work with the partnership. He indicated that informal is more apt to get a positive response:
You tell them to formalize designing a curriculum process and this and that and they just roll their eyes, so you pick up the phone, you go have lunch with them, you go to their plants, you have to pick their brains, so you do an informal date, which I find much easier and much more informative, because you get them to relax, and no one relaxes sitting in a large group meeting telling you their needs, they all sound like puppets, so you got to get them to relax and trust.

Face-to-face interactions have the power to strengthen the relationships in the formation of a partnership. Harold stated, “you know, I think it has to start with face-to-face and building a sense of I believe in this person I’m sitting across from.” Illene explained that being face-to-face has a power to motivate others:

When you are trying to inspire and motivate people to come together around a common cause, you need to be in front of them, and whether it’s one-on-one, or a small group setting, or even in front of a significant audience, I think the power of that interpersonal level of communication to inspire and motivate can’t be replicated in any other way.

Face-to-face communication builds trust between individuals and additionally helps to motivate those in the partnership. The participants in this study overwhelmingly believed in face-to-face communication as the primary method of communicating.

**Written Communication.** Many of the interview participants also voiced the importance of writing as a form of communication in a partnership. This type of communication is best used in certain forms. Illene indicated that written communication works particularly well, “if it’s an exchange of information, it’s great to you know, send stuff back and forth through e-mail, or create Google Docs.” Theo and Harold indicated
that written communication comes after face-to-face communication in the formation of a partnership. Theo stated, “then, after [face-to-face communication], I would say we kind of did a lot of e-mail correspondence.” Harold also mentioned that written communication comes after face-to-face communication: “so now your e-mails are meaningful to me, so I’ll open those and read them and respond, to I’ll sell the product for you to my employees, or would-be employees of my organization, so the –the forms change over time.” Written communication is more situational during the formation of a partnership, and most of the interviews participants agreed that it is most utilized after the foundation of a partnership is established.

The technical center uses an e-mail program called Constant Contact to reach their partners through written communication. This system allows them to send a large amount of communication to partners. Justin stated, “I try to use Constant Contact as much as possible, you know, the e-mail seems to be the easiest way to get everything in mass amounts to people.” Marlene also expressed the importance of Constant Contact as a method of written communication:

We actually use a program called Constant Contact which involves e-mailing, but it's a big e-mail blast versus, you know, e-mail one-on-one, so that does get used a lot for communications.

This informational communication is sent to many partners, but it is also communication that Jessie receives from the technical center.

**Listening.** Listening is also present in the formation of a partnership. Additionally, Harold mentioned that showing the technical center is listening to businesses is a key message that the technical center is trying to send. Illene pointed out
the importance of listening on several occasions: “it’s very important for us to have listened carefully to what it is they’re asking us for” and “that arm of the school, to listen very carefully to what our business community is saying.” The listening that takes place during the development of a partnership helps the technical center keep a pulse on what is needed.

Listening is a process that is important in the partnership between the technical center and Just Right Manufacturing. Illene indicated that she relies on Harold to listen carefully to the businesses. She stated that, “I had to have confidence in our executive director that he had listened carefully, that he was telling me the right things about the needs, and that he had enough intricate knowledge – this will sound bad – but to not be duped.” The listening that Harold does needs to be accurate because it impacts the direction of Greenridge Technical Center in terms of the partnership.

Listening is also an external process that is part of the formation of a partnership. Jessie and Illene both pointed out that the business was pleased when the college listened to the needs of the business. Jessie stated that, “between Harold and Jessie, it was just, finally, somebody’s listening to us.” Illene corroborated this statement. Illene indicated that when the technical center presented the grant to the local employers, including Just Right Manufacturing, she noted the reaction from the groups that “you listened to us, that’s what we said we needed.” The college needs to listen to the partners, and then make sure the partner’s needs are addressed by the college.
Summary of findings. Five themes were explained in the case study between the Greenridge Technical Center and Just Right Manufacturing: motivation, the relationships, trust, information and understanding, and communication. The participants from the technical center and Just Right Manufacturing both indicated that for a sustainable partnership to develop, each organization must have motivations to take part. The motivations were described as coming from the missions of the organizations, which in the case of the community college is helping the community. The participants explained that the technical centers mission aligns with those in Just Right Manufacturing, which is to grow and keep talent in the local area. The resources, which came in the form of materials, were perceived to be a form of motivation for the technical center to sustain the partnership.

The relationships were described as being important and a part of the rural areas, where being from the area and personal relationships and mutual respect were relationship elements in the formation process. The participants provided details about trust, where trust brought people to the partnership and is built internally and externally. Information was explained to be a resource from the relationships that was needed; the individuals relied upon each other to build this partnership. The participants talked about the process where the technical center and business as sought out understanding of each other during the formation of the partnership.

The elements of the partnership were described by participants as being reinforced by the communication that happens during the formation of the successful rural partnership. The participants perceived that the technical center communicated with Just Right Manufacturing that they wanted to understand and listen to the businesses in
the community to find out how the college could help. The findings from this case illustrate that the message being sent is through face-to-face and written communication. Ultimately, the participants perceived that the technical center is trying to send the message that they are listening to the needs of the business. The act of listening was described as a key factor in the communication process between the technical center and Just Right Manufacturing.

**Treetops Community College Case**

In the early 1950s, Treetops Community College began offering classes to fewer than 70 students. Over the years the institution has grown to serve over 6,000 students per year. Students can choose among over 60 academic areas, including transfer and career programs. This college serves six counties in rural Michigan.

Treetops Community College is the city of Marshville where the population is approximately 14,911 (Census, 2014). Whereas Greenridge Community College does not have any businesses surrounding it, there are many businesses surrounding the Treetops Community College and there are many tourists in this town. The main campus is on a busy road that has many hotels and restaurants. This is the largest city in the serving area of the college. The unemployment rate in Marsh County, the county where the college is located, is 6.8% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The other five counties that the college serves have the unemployment rates of 8.9%, 8.4%, 8.4%, 6.0% and 11.9% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).
**Treetops technical center.** In the early 2000s, the community college opened the Treetops Technical Center. The technical center is located on the Hi-Tech Campus about 2 miles away from the main campus. This campus is in an industrial part of town. The center offers degrees and certificates in areas such as automotive, construction, aviation, electrical, plumbing, computer technology, robotics, and welding. As with the Greenridge Technical Center, the Treetops Technical Center offers customizable training and professional development and this facility is very customer service oriented, meaning they are adaptable to the needs of businesses and students. For example, they will travel to a business after hours to provide education to their employees, for the convenience of both business and student. A few of the short term training courses marketed include conflict management, blueprint reading, Microsoft Office, and data analysis. Additionally, if a business approaches the technical center with a specific idea, the technical center staff will develop a training program to fit that need. The technical center promotes and utilizes these programs to make a business’s processes better.

**The participants.** Six individuals participated in the second case study. Five participants are employed by Treetops Community College and one participant is employed by Electronics Incorporated. The participants who worked at the college and the technical center were interviewed in a board room at the technical center. The president of the partnering organization, Colin, was interviewed in a coffee shop, because a snow storm made his organization too difficult to access at the time. He indicated that he felt comfortable being open and honest in this setting. The list of the participants below details the organization they represent as well as their title within the organization:
Table 2

Participants in Treetops Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treetops Community College</th>
<th>Phyllis</th>
<th>Vice President</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treetops Technical Center</td>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Director of Academics in Technical Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gillespie</td>
<td>Director of Corporate Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Training Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>Training Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Incorporated</td>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>President</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phyllis and Colin are the only two participants who do not work in the technical center. I chose to include Phyllis, because her name appears in a newspaper article describing her as an important person in the partnership between the technical center and Electrical Incorporated. At the technical center, Samuel and Gillespie have offices and Dan and Susie have office cubes. All of these office spaces are located in a larger open office space left of the entrance of the building. Samuel works with credit bearing training, which he calls the “academic side” of the partnership. On the other hand, Gillespie, Dan, and Susie work with contracted training where they seek businesses that need customizable training to gain profit for the college. Gillespie stated that, “our department's the corporate training department of the college. So we're kind of the ones to go to when – when nobody else knows what to do with it.” The distinctions that the participants make between the academic and corporate training parts of the technical center are important when reading the themes in this research.

In contrast to the Greenridge case, the Treetops Community College and Technical Center are in a town with many businesses and residences in close proximity. If the participants in this case are out in the community they may not be recognized by anyone as they are in the Greenridge case. The participants in the Treetops case have
more anonymity and may go shopping or to a restaurant and not be recognized by another individual. The day I was on campus it was Samuels’s birthday and everyone in the office was very casual and talking more about the weekend than work related activities. During my conversations with them there was no mention of hanging out together outside of work as they did in the Greenridge case. The only case where people were talking outside of the organizations was Samuel and Colin go out for coffee fairly regularly.

**The relationship at the start of the partnership.** According to Phyllis one particular conversation between the President of Treetops Community College [Alex] and the former President of Electrical Incorporated [Tom] sparked the partnership to form. She explained:

The start of [the partnership] was a conversation that had happened with their founding CEO and our president and as a consequence of that discussion, where it was just a cocktail party conversation between them. [Alex] had recommended that we – we at this point be the area of lifelong learning. Find the connecting point with what he was doing with the photonics training. The start of our relationship with [Tom] who precedes [Colin].

Phyllis is the only person who mentioned this conversation between the President of Treetops Community College and the former President of Electrical Incorporated. Colin, the current President of Electrical Incorporated, who was not involved from the beginning, was not able to talk about how it started that far back. He recalled that the relationship grew closer because of a grant. Gillespie stated, “I actually don't remember our very first connection.” The very beginning was also very difficult for others to
remember. For example, Samuel, who was not involved in the partnership from the beginning talked about the beginning of his involvement:

I didn't initially start the relationship and so it's hard to sort of tell. Where I picked it up on my side was kind of this, and I'll call a problem at the time, was, the development of these courses were kind of just thrown into my lap. And like many people you know, you are busy with your day job and when someone else hands you something, your initial response is, you know, this is your issue, not my issue. So, mine went from, okay, this is a problem I've got to figure out how to solve, to a relationship. And so it transitioned over that period of time, to what's now a really good one.

Although not all of the participants were able to elaborate on the beginning of the partnership between Electrical Incorporated these four individuals were able to express how they understood the partnership had begun.

**The partnership.** The partnership between the Treetops Technical Center and Electronics Incorporated is considered successful. The partnership includes credit bearing training at the college that can culminate into an Associate’s Degree. In addition to academic education, the technical center also offers corporate training. Before the study began Samuel and Gillespie agreed that the partnership with Electrical Incorporated is successful. These two individuals are leaders within the technical center and their names were given to me by Phyllis based on the definition I provided regarding what it means to have a successful partnership. Electrical Incorporated is part of the electrical technology industry. Colin indicated that the partnership develops employees within his organization. Colin stated, “I would say we've sent about a dozen [employees] through
[the training] in the last two years.” The partnership has provided training for Electrical Incorporated, and the college needs to develop up to date training. The partnership was able to offer both organizations outcomes that they would not have been able to reach on their own.

**Themes: Treetops Technical Center**

Five themes came from codes (the conceptual framework) along with the interviews, documents, and observations at Treetops Technical Center. These themes are: (a) motivation, (b) the relationships, (c) trust, (d) information and understanding, and (e) communication. I triangulated data from each of the sources (interviews, observations, and documents) to determine these themes and the subthemes that are explained in this section.

**Motivation.** The motivation to create a partnership is evident in the case study of Treetops Community College and Electrical Incorporated. The motivations of both organizations and participants helped to grow and hold together the partnership. The participants explain their needs for the partnership to remain successful. Phyllis succinctly summarized the broad motivations that drove their partnership:

First of all, they're [businesses] interested in partnership, that's always a high motivator for us. The second piece is they had a very clear vision themselves, their industry, and the potential of the industry in the region— and training and education is very high on what they needed. So, they were very compelling in the case. Partnership is our interpretation; it's very high on what compels us. So, they were very different and they were asking us to prepare a workforce, the
talent pool that we did not know was needed. So absolutely, you have 20 reasons why, you know, why it was that way.

The motivations that emerged from the data indicate that there were reasons for the two organizations to partner. The subthemes in this section are: (a) potential in area of training, (b) interest in partnership for training students, (c) financial resources as motivation, and (d) alignment of motivations.

**Potential in area of training.** The technical center is motivated in training with the potential for industry growth in the region. Phyllis mentioned the potential of industry specific training as valuable; other participants had similar sentiments about this motivation. Colin stated, “Samuel and Gillespie, and those guys, and [Alex] are interested in getting in photonics and where a lot of good growth is in a global market.” That said, Samuel stated that a specific number of students are needed in order to run the trainings: “we have minimum standards, we need 12 or 14 students to make the course run, so we need that.” Susie expressed similar sentiments in her interview. Since Electrical Incorporated had enough students to warrant the training, the technical center provided the training. Colin explained: “they [the technical center] had a strong need for high tech training and [electrical technology].” Electrical Incorporated has employees that need training, so the industry specific training is provided with no loss to the technical center.

**Interested in partnering for training students.** The first motivation for the Treetops Technical Center and Electrical Incorporated is training; both organizations are interested in partnering for training. The technical center needs students to train, and Electrical Incorporated has employees that it needs trained. By partnering for the training
of students the organizations are sharing resources while also meeting a need. Colin explained:

[The technical center is] open to working with us on a training program and curriculum around [electrical technology], which is an emerging high tech area. There aren't a lot of companies in this area, really any, that need [electrical] technicians and people with [electrical] training– and [Treetops Community College] had always seemed open to working with us. They saw the value of that market and we pushed hard.

Training as a shared motivation ties the two organizations together. Samuel stated, “Initially, the motivation, they were – came to us to – because they needed resources, our motivation was basically they had students that we could put in our program.” Electrical Incorporated had employees who it needed trained in a very specific field. Colin explained:

Basically get the core competencies that they don't have that we provided kind of what we need them to do, if they don't understand what it is that they're doing. So we go back and we get the fundamentals […] and we do internships through that with high school students in the summer. So they – I guess the willingness for them to look at that technology and start to get behind it. It's starting to get some momentum.

Susie agreed that there is a motivation to train on the part of Colin and Electrical Incorporated: “I think the motivations that we see them really as a company that is ahead of the curve and that they are committed to training of their employees and growth.” Gillespie stated their willingness, openness and need for training is a motivation: “we
usually deal with these odd kinds of requests or things that don't fit into a normal
traditional academic program.” The training of the employees is a motivator for Colin and Electrical Incorporated. The Treetops Technical Center needs programs to run that have student need. This helped the two organizations match up and build the training program.

Financial resources as motivation. The student training also means the need of bringing in resources, such as financial motivations. Dan, who works in the Corporate Training Department, stated: “so, our goal is we contract directly with companies to provide training to their employees. So, it’s generally a revenue generator for the college.” Samuel also spoke about financial resources as motivation to pursue and maintain a partnership: “we have some funding that allows us basically as they bring on and train new employees, and they [Electrical Incorporated] get to offset taxes, so we have a training group which will be part of that organization.” The college can use finances that will come to the company to promote their training with Electrical Incorporated. The financial resources are a motivation for both the technical center and the Electrical Incorporated.

Participants also explained that employer surveys offer motivation as well. Gillespie explained the survey: “because of our affiliation with the national program companies that we do – manufacturing companies we do projects for get surveyed by a third party.” The participants pointed out that there is funding that the technical center receives that is connected to the results of this survey, so they are motivated to do well. Dan continued:
It's a manufacturing extensive partnership, so our clients that we serve actually get surveyed by a third-party organization, over the course of three years as well. So we want to keep those companies reporting positive impacts because it can impact our funding.

In short, positive survey results provide motivation for the technical center, so they can receive financial resources to continue the work in their community.

**Alignment of motivations.** The motivation to align their missions and motivations is important to both the Treetops Technical Center and Electrical Incorporated. Although both organizations have different motivations for wanting to partner, they are both still motivated to be involved in the partnership. Both of the organizations are able to fulfill individual organizational goals that they would not be able to complete on their own. The technical center needs to train students in areas that have potential, and electrical technology is one of those areas. The alignment of the organizations in order to then meet organizational goals is a motivation that is important to developing and sustaining this partnership.

For the alignment in the partnership between Treetops Community College and Electrical Incorporated, Susie explained:

We want to give them the tools so that they can continue to grow and be a part of it. So that we can also learn from them so that the students that we then have adamancy that we can make sure that we are giving the right skill set to them. So it's a win-win. Aligning the organizations is also seen as important by the business side of the partnership.
Colin explained: “there is synergy there. And we need that with partners interwoven when you want to get to this point you need to be on the same page.” The technical center seeks this type of activity and is interested in forming this type of partnership, where both sides were able to make the most of the resources available.

**The relationships.** The relationships helped to form the partnership. Phyllis stated that: “Our most successful partnerships are all built on enthusiastic personal relationships. You know, where someone meets someone there is curiosity, there’s interest.” The partnership between Treetops Community College and Electrical Incorporated started because of a connection between Alex and Tom. A second connection, Samuel and Colin talked about their strong working relationship, which is reinforced by their comments and the meeting they have in a coffee shop. In her interview, Susie described a third relationship with a person at Electrical Incorporated.

Susie stated:

> I work very closely with someone in their human resources area, and so we were talking about different types of trainings and things that were available— and at that point in time we were new to each other… I happen to be lucky that one of the individuals that works there, we have a relationship outside of work on a board together, so we have that relationship as well.

According to Dan, people in a partnership are not friends, but friendship could be a product of the partnership. Dan stated: “Um, are they friends within partnerships? Do I think they're friends first, no. Do I think they have good-working relationships that could borderline a friendship? Yeah.” He then talked about how strong these relationships can
grow and play a role in deepening the partnership. Dan also discussed the negative side to the strength of relationships in partnership:

    We have people, trainers that have worked with companies for a long time. And our – my fear is that maybe those people hold the relationships more than our organization does. So, what happens when those people retire, do the relationships go away?

Most of the participants talk about positive areas of relationships that are important in the formation of a partnership. Phyllis talked about the college and the community as a whole: “we happen to believe very strongly as a college in the networked environment. We live it. It's supported the college. It's, you know, part of our success. This community believes it also, very, very strongly.” The other participants made comments supporting Phyllis’s observations. Personal relationships play a strong role in the formation of the partnership.

    **Trust.** All six participants were asked the following question: “What is the role of trust in partnership formation?” Each member of the technical center expressed the value of trust in the formation of a partnership in various ways. Phyllis stated: “you have to be able to create an environment where prospective partners can build trust with you.” The trust between the partners is a factor in developing and sustaining this partnership.

Dan continued:

    So, I mean, it's not one of those things that just stands out there. It's one of those things that’s essential in the background. You know, if you don't have the trust in there, it's not going to last long – but it's – you know, it's more subjective it's back in everyone's mind.
Trust is a base from which the participants and the organizations were able to work to help build a strong partnership. Gillespie stated that trust is “[h]uge – huge– make sure you get that one– trust is huge. Building trust from – with a – with a client is huge.” The value of trust emerged as a theme in the data. Two subthemes are analyzed in the following sections: trust opens the door and building trust in a partnership.

**Trust opens the door.** The participants indicated that they believe the community trusts the college. The technical center utilizes this trust to build partnerships with area business. Dan stated: “being a community college helps at least with the client's perspective of knowing they are partnering with an organization that's established that they can trust.” This college is in a city but serves mainly a rural area. Phyllis talked about the trust community members have towards the college, which enables the college to build a partnership:

I think, as it is because of our rural tone, we have always had as a very high visible priority holding the community's trust as a public piece. So we're so wedded to the community persona that we have no other thing to be except to – be open to partnership, lay it out as a trusted enterprise in the community.

Being rural thus gave the college a high visibility in the community as a public entity they could utilize in their businesses. Gillespie further explained the trust the community has with the college:

Especially for us, if we say, you know, we're from [Treetops Community College], that brand in this region has a – has a fair amount of credibility, so that gets us in the door. It's not hard for us to cold call a company and get in to see somebody.
The trust that the community has in the organization is a resource for the individuals trying to build the partnerships. They are able to use the trust to further explore connections in the community that might be valuable. Finally, if the business does not fully trust the individual offering the partnership, they can still trust the organization the individual represents.

**Building trust in a partnership.** Building trust in the partnership is another subtheme that emerged from the data. Trust is a form of capital each organization can use to move towards their individual organizational goals. A big part of building trust with organizations is honesty. Honesty has played a role in building trust in the partnership between Treetops Technical Center and Electrical Incorporated. This has not been a smooth development as expressed by both sides of the partnership, although they do view it as successful. Honesty played a large role in the formation of the partnership. Phyllis explained the honesty that went into the formation of the partnership:

> Early on in the relationship with the [Electrical Incorporated] there were – there were portions of the earliest conversations that we treated as confidential conversations between senior leadership. There was care, I think, from the beginning both [Tom] being overt about his concerns with us, us being thoughtful with him about protecting a competitive advantage–because we didn't know each other very well as organizations. So, he was right to be concerned. We were not experienced enough so we were approaching it with caution because we needed to learn some lessons, which were all good. We've worked in that arena before, but again, I think that eliminated being able to be comfortable being clear about what they needed and what we could provide–built some pretty quick pieces to that–our
ability to deliver and to be very clear. It was not all smooth as I mentioned earlier, there were places where we flubbed on delivery pieces. But we were totally up front, hey, this is not going to work. We miscalculated here and we could always work those pieces out, which is why they're a repeat client today.

Phyllis is very pointed in her description of the honesty they had with Electrical Incorporated and their leadership. Gillespie indicated that honesty and friendship were both helpful when building trust, which takes time to develop:

> We did some work for them. But, but over time and that's part of that kind of friendship building. Over time they've come to trust that we're here for their best interest. That we're not here just to try to sell training, because we've let go of some things that we really weren't the best people so, I think it's mutual, you know, not they're – they're, you know, calling us but that doesn't happen overnight. That kind of relationship is usually over a couple years.

The close relationship between Colin and Samuel has also helped to build trust in the partnership. Samuel talked about his relationship with Colin and how this built trust:

> It's [trust] critical. Yeah, without it, there wouldn't be one [a partnership]. You know with this relationship it's kind of always been trust from the beginning. I have a lot of respect for [Colin] – and, you know, when you meet him you, you'll feel the same. He immediately comes off as someone that you're comfortable with – and so, you know, he's very compassionate in terms of talking to you and understanding your needs– and so that builds a trust in the relationship so.

The strength of Samuel and Colin’s relationship as well as other relationships within the partnership helped to develop the trust necessary to form a partnership.
Susie indicated there is a strong connection between the organizations that goes beyond Electrical Incorporated being just a casual relationship; it is imbedded in organizational processes. She claimed the trust is as strong as if technical center staff were actually part of Electrical Incorporated:

[Trust] is really important because we have to have confidentiality. We have to also be able to say, okay, how are we communicating and be able to just sort of say, cut through it. You know, I mean, that it isn't just – it's more of like a customer, more than just the customer relationship, if that makes any sense that we are partners in it together. That we’re just a division of them.

Trust has allowed both entities to strengthen the partnership. The technical center trusts Electrical Incorporated to provide them with good information to develop a program that has a strong future. The technical center grew the trust by marketing the program. The center is pushing for outcomes and the Electrical Incorporated recognizes and respects this effort, which builds the trust in the partnership.

**Information and understanding.** Information that the participants gained from the partnership provides motivation to work towards their mutual goals. The information in this partnership is expressed by the technical center as coming from the business partners. Information is discussed by all of the participants and an important part of developing partnerships.

Colin is the only individual who mentioned information to benefit employees as a subtheme of information, but he is also the sole interviewee from the business side of the partnership. He has a focus on improving and valuing his employees, and this was the purpose of information. Colin stated:
Working with the training center, we're now getting into Hoshin strategic planning, which is a Toyota model for basically creating a three-year business plan. Strategic plan. And we were looking and we have done some strategic planning in the past, but this follows more in line with some of the lean principles that we're implementing in our factory—and they're bringing that. I think that's a process that they're getting involved with in trying to promote and we're collaborating with them, kind of recently on that effort—and it seems to provide good information for our management to start to think strategically.

The employees within his organization gained information from the partnership to improve the processes within their own organization. The information was used to aid the training of the employees within the organization.

The college gained an understanding of what the business does, which is a benefit of the partnership. The technical center needs to understand what Electrical Incorporated is looking for before putting resources into building a specific training for the business. In other words, the college needs to understand the business and the direction the business is taking. In addition, the partnership allows the technical center to understand what skills the students will need to succeed in this industry and thus be able to develop a curriculum for the electrical field. Phyllis pointed out that the skills that Electrical Incorporated is looking for are highly technical and specific:

Well, the skill sets that [Electrical Incorporated] was looking for were very precise and very clearly defined. So it was very easy for us to understand their long-term needs because we could see the curriculum requirements. I mean, this couldn't have been easier. They had a very clear skill set that needed to be
developed; we knew how to do that kind of thing. So information in terms of at
the performance skills attributes of their employees that became an easy common
ground.

Understanding the vision and where they are going long term and improving the skills of
the employees. Dan agreed that understanding the need of a company is a benefit
resulting from gaining information, and the technical center is proactive in seeking out
information to create the best training possible. Dan explained:

Well, I think, the biggest thing is, when it comes to information is just knowing
the needs of the company, if we – we show that we're interested in really
understanding them—and think what their needs are, it helps build that – the
foundation for the – the relationship. Example being at [Electrical Incorporated]
kind of directly connected to it. When was it, it's over a year ago, we put together
a basic machining training program– and it was through Michigan Works and
local council governments – but we ended up getting a group of companies
together basically asking, what skills do you need?
The technical center developed programs from understanding the information they
received from Electrical Incorporated. There was an understanding that the combination
of resources helped both the technical center and the business. Samuel stated:

I think one, you know, again, we have revised the curriculum multiple times to
meet their needs. We have more students in the program. We have more
awareness, the partnership has brought us equipment that we probably would not
have access to […] [T]he need of developing the course and getting academic
students in there–and so I think that once we understand that there is basically a mutual need, communication of that made critical to the partnership. Samuel explained that understanding leads to better curriculum and awareness concerning resources that would not have available without the partnership. Understanding is a benefit that emerges from information gathering.

Information has benefited employees of Electrical Incorporated as well as the technical center. The technical center has utilized the information to develop training. In short, information has allowed both organizations, Treetops Technical Center and Electrical Incorporated, to act on their needs to the mutual benefit of the other organization.

**Communication.** All of the participants expressed the importance of communication during the formation of a partnership. The message each of the people and their organizations are trying to send is mostly done by face-to-face and by written communication. Samuel stated: “you know all forms, phone, email, direct communication. I think most important is direct.” Gillespie corroborated Samuel’s statement: “with customers initially, it's that face-to-face. Secondary, I would say phone, and then kind of third, when you got a strong relationship the emails, you know, great.” Receiving messages, which is also an important part of communication; this is where listening has its part in the formation of the partnership.

A large amount of the communication that happens in the formation of this rural partnership was informal, which is seen throughout each of the themes. Phyllis talked about the process of internal communication as an informal process:
It is not hierarchal in a formal way, but it is redundant, more circular, more networked, and planful in that regard. It's not accidental. Everyone is small enough that we can all check in. Who has talked to [Colin]? What's going on? Give me an update. You know that – that – that's our dynamic.

Informality in the communication can be seen throughout each of themes in the following sections.

The message being sent. The participants each indicated the message that they are trying to send to the partnering organization. Gillespie stated “that we are truly here to help improve their global competitiveness, that's our – that's kind of our byline and it's true.” Susie said the message has to do with helping the businesses with the technical center as a resource. Susie explained: “[…]to assist them, you know, that we're a resource—and if whatever that might be, you know just to think of us as a resource.” Phyllis suggested that the messaging is about being willing to work with a business as well as being oriented with their future. She explained how this works:

I hope the message is that we've been consistent is our willingness to meet them, where their needs are and to try and look ahead with them a little bit. I think the message that we keep reinventing with ourselves, and I don't know that we've deliberately had with them, is that we intend as a partner to get ahead of their vision enough to anticipate their need down the road. I think good partners try to do that. That's the hardest thing for to us do.

These individuals have sent similar messages that have to do with helping their business partner.
Colin described the message Samuel sent: “I think his message has been that we want to – we want to continue to grow this and make it better. They see a market there, there's jobs.” Interestingly, Samuel also addressed his personal message during the development of the partnership with Electric Incorporated: “I think it's respect and mutual understanding. I think once you have that then whatever problem you are trying to solve, you can work through those.” How Colin views Samuel’s message is different than how Samuel views his own message. Although the messages that they are sending may not be perceived by the receiver in the way they are by the sender, the messages are perceived positively.

**Face-to-face communication.** In the partnership between Treetops Technical Center and Electrical Incorporated, the participants all agreed that the best form of communication in developing a partnership is face-to-face. Face-to-face communication appeared mostly in informal situations. Phyllis explained: “we tend to be a relatively informal organization and we rely extensively on the face-to-face interaction.” The partnership itself began at a cocktail party, which illustrates the importance of informal, face-to-face interactions between key parties at the beginning of a partnership. Colin confirmed that much of the communication remains face-to-face: “they just come up to your facility or we go there.” Face-to-face communication is a very prevalent when the participants talked about the formation of this partnership. Samuel stated “I think it's face-to-face. Absolutely face-to-face. I don't know whether it's a function of the way I operate, but I think you can't read a person or gauge a person unless you are looking at them.” This is a theme that appeared in the interviews of every participant in this case study. Colin emphasized the informal nature more so than the other participants:
My communication – well as you know, I mean, I have coffee with Samuel. So, it's an informal discussion of what's working, what's not – and we've had some pretty frank discussions at times where this hasn't been working and – or it's been instructor related or feedback that I'm hearing from my employees about the classes. You know, it's got to have value if they come back and start complaining about the curriculum or this or that, it's just going to flow through the organization and not – people aren't going to want to go there and do it because of the time so. Our relationship is from a number of us – well not – [Samuel] – [Samuel's] relationship and mine is pretty informal.

Samuel corroborated Colin’s description when he said, “where it became most effective for us in developing the partnership is we would meet for coffee in the morning before work. Like we just met…yesterday.” This informal communication is done through face-to-face. Dan talked about the power of face-to-face interactions over other types of communication when starting a partnership:

I mean, a big part of forming the partnership initially, I mean, it's face-to-face communication. It's going out to, you know – going out to a public event. Going out to rotary meetings, you know, whatever it is locally, and having small conversations that kind of – cascades on that, starting with the, you know, somewhat interpersonal relationships. Face-to-face communication, I mean, it's a key to get it started. And then we do, at least I do try and use, you know, I’d rather use phone for certain companies rather than e-mail for – that kind of communication. I think voice is a stronger relationship builder than an e-mail.
Gillespie agreed that face-to-face is the most effective type of communication. He also indicated that being in each other’s presence by taking tours of each other’s facilities was a method to be face-to-face conversation:

But the most effective thing, and I think I said this early on, was that face-to-face, that physical, you got to get in front of them...especially like [Electrical Incorporated], it's about seeing them – you know, we've been – I've been out there, I've toured their plant. We've taken companies – other companies out there through our learning consortium to tour their plant at least once. So, it's keeping in touch even when you're not working with them under contract.

Susie also indicated that face-to-face was the most important communication approach and she had been on a tour of Electrical Incorporated and they had come to the technical center for a tour. She stated: “It's more than just emailing back and forth, it's really talking and understanding. We also did tour there, they've also been here and seen our facility. So, there's that relationship, too, you know, understanding even surroundings.”

Face-to-face emerged as prevalent form of communication during the formation of this partnership. Informal communication is prevalent between the two partners as well. The group did not discuss formal communication in terms of face-to-face.

**Written communication.** The participants did not focus on written communication as much as face-to-face. The statements from the participants about written messages are very brief. For example, Gillespie stated that “email is not necessarily a good way to start a conversation or to build one.” Colin agreed that “it’s not email or phone very much.” Phyllis continued: “there aren't a lot of explicit documents that chart the progress.” Samuel stated that there are negative effects from
email: “I mean, it's easy to hide an email. And so it's easy to be misunderstood too.”

Written communication is not very important in this partnership.

Although written communication was voiced as not being very important, there are a few participants that indicate how written communication is used within the partnership. Dan feels that there is a place for written communication: “then eventually it [face-to-face communication] can be continued up with – followed up with e-mail, that kind of thing.” In other words, face-to-face communication is primary and written communication is for follow up. Phyllis agreed that written communication comes after face-to-face communication:

[Discussions are] primarily conversational until we got to a place that we were doing, I mean, phone call, e-mail. When we got to planning for their first new jobs training program contract, we really started to develop much more of a profile in writing by necessity.

The written communication Phyllis talks about is formal in nature. One participant, Gillespie, spoke about a newsletter that is sent out to partners: “I mean, we – we send the emails to people we have a newsletter we send out.” He also stated that written communication is internal: “we're attempting to do a week end review, just a quick email. It's a one-page list. Here's – here are key things we worked on this week.” Gillespie’s example of written communication is internal and a way for the technical center to track the highlights the work on the partnership rather than communicate with the partner.

Listening. A few of the participants in this study highlight the idea of listening as a part of the communication theme. In this case, participants discussed listening as taking place between the two organizations. Listening is a very important idea in the forming of
the partnership. Dan and Gillespie expressed that listening to the people in the organization you are working with is the best way to align the partnership and move forward. As Dan indicated, listening is present in the partnership:

I guess, mainly, constantly listening to what their needs are and asking. So listening to the needs drives the next step in the partnership. That's one of the key things, I think, that we can at all fall down on sometimes is having doing engagement, working to a certain point and then just kind of not asking, what's the next step or not taking it, you know, one step further.

Gillespie agreed with Dan’s statement that listening helps the partnership run more smoothly: “So, we're very responsive as we're listening to them and trying to build programming around them rather than building programming and trying to push it out.” Each partner must listen to the other in order to make sure needs are met and the training programs are built around the business’s needs.

**Summary of findings.** Five themes were explained in the case study of the partnership between the Treetops Technical Center and Electrical Incorporated: motivation, the relationships, trust, information and understanding, and communication.

Participants from the technical center and Electrical Incorporated both expressed the need for motivations to partner in order for a partnership to form. The motivations in this partnership were described as coming from the motivation to train students (employees). Those in the technical center stated that they are motivated by industries where there is potential for training. The alignment of the two organizations was also mentioned as motivating factor in this partnership.
The relationships, trust, information, understanding, and communication are present during the formation of this successful rural partnership. The relationships were described as helping to form the partnership. The participants provided information about trust in their interviews, where trust opens the door and is an element that needs to be built. Information was explained by the participants as being a resource. The participants said there is a process where the technical center and business sought out understanding of each other during the formation of the partnership.

As described in the interviews, the technical center communicates with Electrical Incorporated that they wanted to help improve their organization. The participants expressed that Electrical Incorporated’s message is to improve their employees. As perceived by the participants, the Treetops Technical Center and Electrical Incorporated communicate their messages to each other mainly through face-to-face. Listening is described by the participants as helping direct the partnership between the technical center and Electrical Incorporated as well.

**Cross-Case Themes**

The interview participants from the Greenridge and Treetops cases all disclosed their views very openly as there was no hesitation on answering any of the questions and some of the participants talked about being excited to talk about this subject. The themes detailed below emerged from within codes and cross case analysis of insights provided by all participants. Table 3 below illustrates the themes and subthemes of creating and maintaining a partnership that emerged from using the conceptual framework to examine the data.
Table 3

Emergent Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme One: The Needs</th>
<th>Theme Two: The Pulse</th>
<th>Theme Three: The Links</th>
<th>Theme four: The Sign Posts of Sustaining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various Needs</td>
<td>Gaining Information</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Outcomes and Formalizing (Grants, Curriculum, and Formalizing documentation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment and Meeting of Needs</td>
<td>Bringing about an Understanding</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating Needs</td>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Face-to Face Communication</td>
<td>Incorporating Written Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme one: The needs.** Theme one incorporates the needs of the organizations partnering together. All of the participants in the study talked about partnership needs and how the needs played a part in the overall formation of the partnership. Subthemes also emerged from the data regarding the needs. These subthemes are (a) various needs, (b) alignment and meeting of needs, and (c) communicating needs.

**Various needs.** Interviewees described the needs of the partnership in various ways, one of them being the needs of their own organizations. All of the participants from the technical centers and businesses talked about the fulfilling of specific needs. Gillespie (Director of Corporate Training at Treetops) noted the importance of meeting the needs of Electrical Incorporated: “if we don't fulfill a need with the company, or we mess it up, that words going to get around and our market's going to shrink.” The needs that motivated the technical centers and businesses included the potential in area of training, training needs, and resources.
Potential in area of training. Technical centers need to connect with organizations involved in industries with a good outlook in the job market; this includes the amount of pay and number of positions. The interviewees of both colleges described both Just Right Manufacturing and Electrical Incorporated as being successful industries in their respective communities. The technical centers specialize in training and seek out businesses in the area that are in industries that have a good outlook in terms of employment. In the Greenridge Case, Justin (Wind Grant Coordinator) spoke about the good outlook for wind industry in the area “the major industry we have around here, it's [wind power]. Three of the top five equipment manufacturers are located in [this] county.” Many of the participants indicated that there is a need for the particular industry in each respective community (wind and electrical technology). As such, there is potential for industry growth in the communities as well as a need for students to complete coursework in that particular area of growth. Continued industry growth and training local community members to work in the available positions within the company creates positive economic growth.

Training needs. All of the participants indicated that training is important for those involved with the partnership. Although this study utilized the relationship between Greenridge Technical Center and Just Right Manufacturing, Greenridge Technical Center also partners with many other businesses in the community through a grant that focuses on the wind industry. In contrast, the Treetops partnership is a partnership solely between the technical center and Electrical Incorporated; the technical center mentioned no other businesses in need of training in this industry in their community. Jessie (General Manager at Just Right Manufacturing) stated that she
represents her organization but also many other manufacturing organizations on the board of the technical center:

[S]o I represent the manufacturing community [on the board of the Technical Center], the voice of the manufacturers, what our needs are for trained workers in the workforce, and all along we've been struggling trying to find people that are trained and qualified.

There is a need for a trained workforce stemming from a lack of trained people in the Greenridge and Treetops communities to fill positions. Gillespie stated that, “they [Electrical Incorporated] had a strong need for high tech training.” The business partner from the Treetops partnership, Colin (President of Electrical Incorporated), also talks about the need for training. Colin expressed this sentiment when he stated his company “collaborat[ed] with the college on what training needs we needed.” All of the participants on both sides of the partnership express that the training needs are the reason for the partnership. Samuel (Director of Academics in Technical Areas at Treetops) affirmed that Colin needed training: “we actually built an [electrical technology] program, you know, specialization. So, we just kind of worked together to kind of fill his needs.” Susie (Training Consultant at Treetops) indicated that as Electrical Incorporated grew, so did their “need for training.”

*Resources.* Resources become available because a partnership provides economic motivation for the partnership. Samuel stated one of the needs of the partnership is that, “they [the technical center] needed resources.” The colleges and businesses look to the partner to share resources and obtain resources that would not be available to each individual organization if it were not for the partnership. For example, Jessie from the
Greenridge Technical Center case brought metal to help train students. Additionally, resources appear in the form of money. Dan (Training Consultant at Treetops) spoke about the need for revenue at Treetops Technical Center; “well so, from the training services side of it, you know corporate training side, I guess it's revenue from that perspective.” The training services part of the technical centers has the mission of bringing in revenue.

Another avenue of resources is grants; interviewees at both colleges talked about the importance of grants in fulfilling the obligations of the partnership. Many of the participants in the Greenridge partnership spoke about the grant they have been awarded. Harold (Director of the Technical Center at Greenridge) described the importance of grants:

It's the same cry that we hear nationally and in the State of Michigan, which has a significant manufacturing population, and so we met regularly with our manufacturing partners as part of our every day meeting doing workforce and economic development, they serve on our advisory committees in a number of ways, and the loud – or the cry got louder and so we took that opportunity to look to fulfill the needs by seeking grants.

The resource needs of a partnership can be fulfilled through grants. There is money available to develop training programs connecting organizations together. Colin (President of Electrical Incorporated) elaborated, in detail, on the grant work and the opportunities that came from it:

We really got engaged with [Treetops] back in early 2010 with a [grant] – and this was based upon new hires. So, it was something new that legislatively came out.
It basically – you divert employee tax dollars from going to the State payroll tax, and those dollars go to the college—and basically you put together a plan – training plan of how many people you think are going to be bringing on in the next few years—and then you start to divert those tax dollars to those people that qualify to the conditions of that grant. So, they have to make a certain amount of money. They have to be new positions, new hires. And at the time of us signing that, we went through a real rapid growth period; our company hired about 35 people. So we had a lot of people that qualified for this grant. At the time I was thinking it was only going to be a couple people, you know, a low dollar amount to play with, but it actually turned out to be – it was about $60,000 that we were able to spend over a three-year period. That gave us an opportunity to look at collaborating with the college on what training needs we needed. They administered the grant. So, if they didn't offer the training that we wanted or they offered, they would go out and help us find what training needs we needed.

The resources partners gained from each other were of value in partnering. If they were not able to gain these resources, then the partnership would not have moved forward.

There are grants that are available only to partnerships. The organizations would not be able to receive this money by themselves.

**Alignment and meeting of needs.** The community colleges and the businesses all expressed a desire to align their various organizational needs for their partnership to work. Alignment of needs allows the college and business to work together despite having similar, yet differing, needs. In some cases needs do align directly. For example, one organization needs to offer training while the other organization needs training for its
employees. Additionally, one organization may require financial resources and the other may require training. In that case, the organization in need of training can provide the organization offering training the proper resources to then train employees of the organization with the resources. As Illene (President of Greenridge Community College) explained, the partnership has to “align with everybody’s needs. Not only do these needs need to align, but they also must meet. The partners need to fill each other’s needs in a mutually beneficial way.” The alignment and the meeting of needs motivates the organizations to partner.

*Communicating needs.* The message both the technical centers send is that they want to understand the needs of the partnering businesses. In return, the businesses sent messages explaining what they needed from the college. The participants of both colleges describe the message sent to the business partners as one of openness and wanting to help local businesses with growing industries as well as a positive outlook on community growth and partnership potential. Both of the technical centers express their needs to understand a business’s needs. In the Greenridge case study, the participants from the technical center describe their message is their desire to listen to the needs of the community. Theo (Director of Placement at Greenridge) provides a very thorough explanation in the Greenridge analysis, explaining that the main communication towards businesses is that the college is looking for the needs of the community so they can develop programming around those needs. The technical center has a need to help businesses improve their workforce. Jessie corroborated Theo’s statements, saying that the college is out in the community trying to determine what the businesses need.
Treetops Community College staff echoed these statements. For example Phyllis (Vice President at Treetops), explained:

I hope the message is that we've been consistent in our willingness to meet them, where their needs are and to try and look ahead with them a little bit. I think the message that we keep reinventing with ourselves, and I don't know that we've deliberately had with them, is that we intend as a partner to get ahead of their vision enough to anticipate their need.

In addition to understanding the present needs of businesses to allow for mutual gains, the technical centers are trying to understand their needs into the future.

The message of respect and mutual understanding is consistent across the participants. Samuel indicated that the communication sent to their partner has to do with “respect and mutual understanding.” Both technical centers expressed a need for respect and mutual understanding in trying to discover the needs of the businesses.

Theme two: The pulse. The second emergent theme is the pulse. The pulse is a theme that is in line with the feedback loop (Eddy, 2010b). Jessie explained how the Greenridge Technical Center keeps a pulse on her company’s needs:

They always have to be feeling our pulse to find out what we need and then developing their programs around that, so they're always, what's going on, what's going on, what do you need, what do you need, so – and that's what makes it work.

Three related subthemes about the pulse emerged from the research: (a) gaining information, (b) bringing about an understanding, and (c) listening.
**Gaining information.** Both of the colleges actively seek information from their partnering organizations. Many of the college staff participants discussed how they seek this information. Information is described as a significant part of keeping a pulse on the partnering organization. Harold described the process of gaining information and feedback:

It becomes a matter of gaining information when they are around the table, what are your needs, how are we going to meet those needs, and then it becomes a matter of information again from the standpoint of we've taken it and now we'll feedback to you what we heard, is this what you – what we thought we heard.

This information was given in multiple forms, including a survey that the Treetops Technical Center sends out a survey to their partners to gauge how they are doing. This survey is primarily sent out for financial reasons but also provided feedback to the technical center. There were some who did not like that a survey was utilized. Gillespie elaborated on his feelings about the survey:

It's called an Impact Survey, so that impacts are reported direct by the company.

It's a little intrusive like it's – I – I don't like, I like that it happens, but I don't like that it burdens our customers with kind of forcing them to respond in the survey.

This was not a prevalent way that most participants talked about gaining information from the businesses; the more popular was informal ways that these participants seek information. Theo stated the importance of gaining information:

We're trying to gather as much information as possible, the key one is numbers.

You need to know the size of companies, the need for companies, if – I mean, going back to the – we'll just use welding as an example because everyone knows
what welding is – if we go out together – if we can't gather information about welding needs, we don't know if we need to build a program.

The technical center staff gathered information to discover which direction to go with the partnership and what they had to do internally to make the partnership happen. For example the staff collects information on whether the field is has a positive outlook. If the technical center decides to take on a new field they have to find out what needs to be covered in the curriculum. This curriculum needs to be developed and implemented internally. In these high tech industries this generally means hiring or educating current instructors and getting new equipment for training. This is all an internal process that has to be worked out and a change within the technical center.

The information that emerges from the partnership allows each of the partners to keep a pulse on the developments. Justin explained that information is important, but is not always received:

So understanding, communication, and it goes both ways. I mean, we can pump out as much and send as much information out, but no one reads it or looks at it, then you're in, you know, little middle zone which happens all the time.

Participants described information and understanding as related to one another in the formation of these two partnerships. The information is in the sending of the messages, but partners also need to understand the information.

**Bringing about an understanding.** Understanding is a prominent theme in both case studies as well as in the cross case analysis. Understanding helps the participants to keep a pulse on the other organizations in the partnership. Justin indicated that understanding is a two way street. The technical center needs to understand the company
and the company’s needs. In turn, the business needs to understand what the technical center is capable of producing. If the technical centers understand what the business is looking for, they can better allocate resources. Illene talked about how the partners value Harold because he understands the company and the industry. Phyllis and Dan also spoke about understanding the needs of the company as well as understanding the future needs of the company. The centers must have an understanding of the future of the industry they are getting into in order to be a part of the partnership. Through the partnerships, the colleges keep a pulse on the skill sets that are necessary for success in a particular industry. Jessie expressed that understanding needs to be of the present moment but also needs to project into the future:

[…] good firm understanding of what we have right now, what we need right now, what are our trends – you know, I'm in lasers now, and if they would have been paying attention to me when I was just using saws and shears, I would be all set with saw and shear guys. I need CNC guys, I need guys that understand laser technology.

The future orientation of understanding was described by participants as keeping a pulse on the direction of the industry and the training that keeps students up to date. The information and understanding in a partnership help keep a pulse on the industry itself and the companies in the community.

Listening. Listening is the third subtheme that emerged in the analysis, which is reminiscent of the feedback loop. The technical centers listened to their partners to gain information and ultimately understanding. There are examples from both the partnerships that illustrate specific instances where listening was a part of the partnership
formation. Jessie explained she was very excited when the staff at Greenridge Technical Center listened to Just Right Manufacturing. Harold explained that his staff needs to listen to the needs of Electrical Incorporated to provide appropriate training. Illene also explained that she relies on Harold to listen to the businesses to make sure they are going in the right direction and fulfilling needs that need to be filled. The need for listening is also articulated by the Treetops Technical Center. Dan and Gillespie reinforced the subtheme of listening to the needs of the partnership, which drives the partnership forward and encourages Treetops Technical Center to build new programing for the organization. In addition their business partner, Colin talked about the listening and the large part it had to do in understanding the direction of the technical center and their connections internationally. He indicated that the technical center is going in the direction of having a global presence, which he sees as a fit for his organization. Listening plays a large part in determining the pulse of the industry at large as well as the local partnering organization.

**Theme three: Strength of the links.** The third theme is the Strength of the Links, which encapsulates the strength of the relationships that took part during the formation of a partnership. Three subthemes emerged: (a) relationships, (b) trust, and (c) face-to-face communication.

**Relationships.** The partnerships were formed based on prior relationships between at least two parties. Additionally, several participants indicated that they formed friendships within the partnership once the partnership began. Although friendships may not be a top priority in the partnership, other relationship elements are incredibly important. At Treetops Technical Center, Phyllis spoke about how the most successful
partnerships begin because of “enthusiastic personal relationships.” Samuel and Colin referenced their informal relationship and how this played a role in the formation of the partnership. There were other connections that illustrate the connections in this case. Colin and Gillespie both talked about being neighbors, when Colin was growing up. There is one more relationship worth noting, Susie also explained that she is good friends with a person in the Human Resources area of Electrical Incorporated.

In the Greenridge partnership, personal relationships are described as part of the formation of the partnerships. Many interview participants talked about how they play golf together or see each other at different local events, which is an occurrence that happens often in their rural area. Jessie referenced a relationship she has with a former employee of the Greenridge Technical Center:

[Laura], who worked for him [Harold] at the time, turned out to be one of my best friends. You know, I mean, I didn't know her then [when the partnership started], but she was the one – she had [Theo’s] job at the time, and so she was at my shop all the time, “what do you need?”

Personal relationships that take place in these two partnerships reinforce the links that they have with one another in these rural areas.

**Trust.** All of the participants in both case studies express the importance of trust as reinforcing the links in the formation of a partnership. Gillespie is adamant that trust is the bedrock of a partnership; other participants hold this view as well. Dan explicitly stated that without trust a partnership cannot persevere. The technical centers try to build trust with their community partners but also need to trust the community partner in turn.
The technical centers build trust with other individuals within the partnering organization. The closeness of individuals in both partnerships is described by the participants as part of building trust. Harold built trust internally and externally with his partners. Illene expressed the need for internal trust as well when she describes how she has to trust Harold in his role and know that she was receiving reliable information. Jessie also expressed her trust in Harold. Participants in the Treetops case study echo the need for trust in a partnership. For example, an analysis of the data gathered on Colin and Samuel’s relationship included a lengthy description about the trust they built prior to the partnership and how this influenced the success of the partnership. This relationship is described as having trust from the beginning of the partnership. Samuel explained that having trust from the beginning of the partnership is essential to the existence of the partnership. Gillespie stated that “friendship building” helps to build trust with the partners over time.

Many of the participants explain that trust is not something the technical centers needed to earn on their own. Instead, the community college has earned the trust of the community. As such, technical centers can rely on the reputation of the college to spark the initial trust of potential partners. Phyllis said that Greenridge Community College built and now maintains the trust of the public. Gillespie further explained that the brand Treetops Community College fosters is a sense of trust specifically with the businesses in the community. The community colleges in both rural areas are described as having strong sense of trust within their communities. Dan stated: “it's [the community college] a pillar in the community.” He further explained that if the college was a private consulting firm, they may not have the trust built into their organization. The
communities in these rural areas have grown to trust the community college. The technical centers are able to use the trust that these institutions have built to benefit and initiate partnerships in the community.

**Face-to-face communication.** The third subtheme is face-to-face communication. The most prominent type of communication in both cases is face-to-face informal communication, which builds the personal relationships and trust. In the cross case analysis, face-to-face communication emerges as a subtheme that supports relationships in both case partnerships. Justin, who worked in an urban community college in the past, explained that in an urban partnership you may never meet the person you work with face-to-face. In contrast, face-to-face communication is a foundation in rural partnerships. Harold further explained that face-to-face communication is related to trust, allowing one to invest in the idea of “I believe in this person.” As Theo mentioned, face-to-face communication is really the “first step” at the beginning of a partnership. Additionally, face-to-face communication allows the partnership to maintain close relationships in rural area.

Face-to-face communication is best for building and maintaining relationships, whereas e-mail is not seen as valuable. Illene stated strongly that interpersonal communication can be used to “inspire and motivate;” other forms of communication do not have this capability.

Dan stated that face-to-face communication is very important and, “it is a key to get it started.” He also indicated that you get to know the person better. Personal relationships often lead to trust. Colin and Samuel also spoke about the informal face-to-face communication that they have had and the importance of this to the formation of the
partnership. Jessie and Justin also mentioned that they communicate with people in the partnership in very informal ways like on the golf course, and at a tavern, or the grocery store.

**Theme four: Sign posts of sustaining.** The fourth theme that emerged from the data is sign posts of sustaining. These are signs that a partnership is in a forward progression toward sustainability. Two subthemes emerged from the data regarding sign posts of sustaining: outcomes and formalizing and incorporating written communication.

**Outcomes and formalizing.** The sign posts of sustaining appear through outcomes and formalizing process. These posts signify the movement of the partnership from development to sustaining. There are three subthemes related to outcomes and formalizing: (a) grants, (b) curriculum, (c) and formalizing documentation.

**Grants.** Grants are outcomes of these two partnerships, but neither of the partnerships began because of grants. Instead, as discussed previously, they began due to a need for financial resources in the community as well as connections or relationships among the individuals involved. The Greenridge case was selected because it began because of a grant, but during the interviews participants described that the partnership began because of relationships. The Treetops case was selected and confirmed by participant interviews to have started because of a relationship. Grants were outcomes of the partnerships and provide resources that would not be available if it were not for the partnership. The resources, in turn, help the partnership to flourish. Harold explained that the partnership existed before the Technical Center pursued the grant: “the way the grant came about is we have a cluster of plastics manufacturers in this region significant
to the [wind] industry.” The grant gives the partnership resources that would not be available without partnership.

Illene explained that getting people together in rural areas for a partnership is very easy, but the coordination of this type of venture, like applying for the grant, is the difficult part. In each of the partnerships the grant is something that inevitably comes after the partnerships developed; this is something that helps sustain their ventures. Once the partnership received the grant, they had to formalize the process further. As such, the college had to hire a grant coordinator, essentially creating an employee specific to that project alone. Justin was hired with grant money.

Curriculum. Another outcome is the development of curriculum connecting the two partners together and meeting the needs of both partners. The curriculum is developed in concert between the technical centers and the businesses. Illene stated that the technical center asks the partners to participate in the development of the curriculum to not only meet their needs but also foster a long term commitment with a business.

Theo spoke about the development process:

[Justin] is more working on the, you know, the credit stuff and what's in the classes and what's the curriculum, so that was kind of the first aspect was going around and kind of explaining to some of the – especially the major partners that are, like, going to be like our bigger names to make sure what you really want to have on as part of it.

The businesses are important in developing the curriculum for the partnership and formalizing the training process for new students. Justin described the interplay between the Technical Center and business: “the curriculum group are the guys and gals that say
this is what we need now and in the future, so I send every course to them.” Finally, Samuel explained that the college has to be flexible and work with the businesses by “revis[ing] the curriculum multiple times to meet their needs.” This formalizing process of developing the curriculum tied the people together over a shared purpose.

*Formalizing documentation.* Formalizing documentation also helps with outcomes of the partnership. This includes the signing of documents. Colin explained that the signed documents foster a certain sense of trust. He also stated that there is a right fit between the organization and the rules of the grant to be able to sign the documents, “at the time of us signing that, we went through a real rapid growth period; our company hired about 35 people. So we had a lot of people [employees at Electrical Incorporated] that qualified for this grant.” Justin further explained that the signing of documents also helps with accountability to the partnership: “[I can ask Illene], could you make a call for me, and she'll do more than that, sometimes she'll get right there and say, you signed up for it, you better get your butt to the table.” There are also other documents to be signed. Susie stated: “and also on an HR side of it, you need to have documentation, you know, it's pretty rigid.” The business practice of documentation formalizes the partnership.

*Incorporating written communication.* Incorporating written communication with external partners is the third subtheme of theme 4. It allows for a transition from informal communication (face-to-face) to formal communication (written) and thus emerges as a sign post. Gillespie pointed out that the first step in the partnership should not be through e-mail. Dan and Phyllis agreed with Gillespie, indicating that e-mails followed face-to-face communication.
Written communication is not a very prevalent form of communication in the Treetops partnership. As Colin explained, they do not use e-mail very much. Indeed, participants discussed e-mails as formal or impersonal methods of communication. In the Greenridge partnership, Theo explained there is a process where written communication comes after face-to-face communication in a partnership. According to Samuel, face-to-face communication may be how a partnership begins, but as the partnership develops, e-mails became more valuable: “So, now your e-mails are meaningful to me, so I'll open those and read them and respond.” This movement from face-to-face communication to incorporating written communication is a sign post in the successful rural partnerships moving towards sustainability.

Summary. There are four themes from the cross case analysis: the needs, the pulse, the links, and the sign posts of sustaining.

The participants from both of the colleges indicated that there are various needs that each party must meet when entering a partnership, such as needs for potential growth in an area of training, training needs, and resources. The needs do not necessarily have to match, but they do need to align for both organizations to remain motivated enough to move forward with the partnership.

The pulse of the organizations emerged from using the conceptual framework to examine the data. To keep a pulse, the business partners agree that the technical center partners must gain information and ultimately understand the industry and the business needs. One communication element the technical center participants indicated is necessary to the pulse is listening.
The links, or relationships between participants, emerges as another theme. The links in the partnership exist between people and between people and the organizations. Partners can strengthen the links through personal relationships that formed during the partnership, such as exists between Colin and Samuel or Jessie and Laura. Links are further strengthened by trust. Trust is expressed as the foundation on which many other partnership elements are built, including the acquisition of resources from the other organization. Finally, links are also strengthened by face-to-face communication. Face-to-face communication is very prominent in both partnerships and informal in nature.

Sign posts of the sustaining of the partnership also emerge in this cross case analysis. The first is the outcomes and formalizing of the partnership (grants, curriculum, and business practices). The next sign post is that the communication moves from mainly face-to-face communication to incorporating written communication. More formal communication does find its way into the conversation as the partnership begins to move forward.

The results from this research track very closely with the past literature and the conceptual framework. There are unique qualities within the findings that fall within this framework, such as the unique communication that supports each of the themes. Upon reflection of the findings, the interview questions were fairly direct and brought about particular answers that naturally emerged within the previous models.
Research Questions

Research question 1: How do rural workforce development offices form successful partnerships between their community colleges and businesses? The formation of a partnership includes three phases: the antecedents and motivations that bring about the partnership, the development, and the sustaining of relationships. The technical centers [workforce development offices] seek out and initiate partnerships with businesses that fulfill their needs. The technical centers express these needs to businesses and the community. The centers check the pulse of the community by gaining information through personal connections to see if there is a fit between company need and college capacities. The centers try to come to an understanding of the needs of the businesses which is supported by listening. The participants who work at the technical centers have relationships with people in their rural communities. The participants explained that relationships and building trust are major factor in the formation of a partnership and this is reinforced through face-to-face communication. The centers are able to move towards sustaining the partnership by gaining grants, developing curriculum and formalizing documentation. The technical centers recognize that the communication changes through the course of the partnership, whereby in the beginning it is more face-to-face communication (i.e. events, going out for coffee, grocery store) and moves to incorporate written communication (i.e. e-mail). This is the process that the participants describe the partnerships going through to form partnerships.
Research question 1a: What role does motivation have in forming partnerships? A theme in this study emerged which highlights motivations, such as economics and relationships, in forming the partnerships in these successful rural partnerships. The workforce development offices express their needs while also consciously seeking to understand the motivations of partnering organizations. The participants talk about the lengths they go to understand the motivations of the partnering business.

Motivation manifests in two roles in these partnerships. The first is that it holds the partnership together. The second role is of fulfilling the motivations of the other organization to achieve outcomes, which would not otherwise be met without the partnership. These two roles are described further in the following two sections.

Motivation holds the two partners together. Participants spoke about the motivations that they need fulfilled for the partnership to exist and explain that motivations and needs are the driving force to the success of a partnership. If participants do not believe that their needs will be fulfilled then they cannot move forward with the partnership. The various motivations that are expressed in this research are an adhesive that is used to bring the partners together. The motivations as an adhesive are only good if the motivations align between the two organizations.

The technical centers and businesses mutually seek to fulfill needs they cannot fulfill alone. The technical centers, as described in their missions and visions, seek to fulfill their need to help the community in which they are located. Motivations to fulfill these needs are rooted in the initial creation of the institution. The colleges also fulfill other needs, such as obtaining resources they would not have without the partnership.
For example, in the Greenridge partnership, the technical center gained materials for training they would not have if it were not for the partnership. In turn, businesses receive training that would otherwise remain unavailable, because the technical centers seek out grants to help subsidize the training. The technical centers train students and look for businesses who seek training.

**Research question 1b: What role does social capital (trust, centrality, information, density) play in forming the partnership?** The participants explained that the technical centers seek to build relationships as a resource in partnerships. They expressed that the relationships play the role of a resource that each of the participants uses to help further their organizational and partnership missions and fulfill needs and motivations. The relationships as described by the participants allow access to information, fosters understanding, promotes stronger links between individuals, and makes an individual more central to decision making.

The elements of social capital allow a group or individuals gain information they would not receive if they were not in a partnership. With the businesses, the participants from the technical centers describe the information that they gained assisting them in designing relevant programs and finding students for programs. The information is a resource that the technical centers utilized to fulfill their motivations.

The information in a partnership is only of value if it is understood. The technical centers seek out understanding to develop training programs. Relationships help individuals gain understanding through conversations. Through understanding, the technical centers keep a pulse on the businesses. The businesses also have to have an
understanding of the technical centers and what they were able to provide in terms of services.

The elements of social capital that the individuals in the partnerships accrue stem from strong relationships and trust. The ability to maintain strong relationships and trust strengthens the links between the technical center and partnering organizations. The participants express that living and working in a rural community fosters relationships that help with partnerships. These relationships strengthen the links between the individuals. Although there are individuals within partnerships who are close friends, such as Samuel and Colin, the communities themselves are described as having stronger relationships than would exist in an urban area. Strong relationships in the partnership build trust between the partners.

Trust in a partnership is also an element of social capital that is critical in reinforcing the links between people in the partnership. The trust in the partnerships was described in the interviews as a base from which every activity springs. The participants expressed that trust was required to gain resources from the partnering organization. Since the technical centers in these rural areas have the trust already developed by the community colleges, they do not need to prove their credibility to the businesses. The participants talked about the trust that the community colleges had in their communities. This trust was able to be acted upon in the formation of the partnerships; so when the technical center went to a business they were able to use this trust to help promote their training.

The elements of social capital can make an individual or group central to the decision making process. The participants in a partnership that are central to a
partnership are able to not only dispense information to the greatest number of people in the partnership, but they are also able to receive the greatest amount of information in a partnership. The individuals in the partnership are able to use their trust and close relationships to be able to get to the central most part of a partnership. The central point in a partnership is the decision maker. The participants described that the people central to the partnership are able to use this resource to be able to get close to the decision making process in a partnership and have an influence on the overall partnership.

Research question 2: What communication practices take place in the formation of the successful partnership? The participants described that the communication during the formation of the successful partnerships in the rural areas supports the motivations and relationships. The communication practices of face-to-face communication, written communication, and listening take place in the formation of the successful partnership. The communication practice that emerges most often in the data regarding the formation of a successful partnership is informal face-to-face communication.

Research question 2a: How do workforce development practitioners communicate the partnership internally? The workforce development practitioners communicate mainly with informal and face-to-face communication within the technical centers. Although these individuals prefer informal communication, it also raises challenges to making sure everyone is on the same page in regards to partnering. A few participants did make comments referring to the written communication that happens internally, but this did not emerge as a theme. They hardly mentioned written communication as an internal form of communication. The individuals working in the
technical centers worked very closely together, with many of their workspaces connected. It is very easy for them to talk with one another through the doors of their workspaces or on a drive to meet with partners. When the participants at the technical centers talked about internal communication it was amongst them and very little about how they communicated to the larger community college. A few of the participants indicated that e-mail was used between departments at the college. The lack of communication to the larger campus community expressed by the participants may be because a majority of the technical centers activities happen independently from the overall college. If this study was replicated with a technical center that did not have as much independence there may be more need for leadership support from the community college.

**Research question 2b: How do workforce development practitioners communicate externally with partners?** The workforce development practitioners communicate externally with their partners by utilizing face-to-face and written as their methods of communication. As the partnership progressed, the types of communication increased, where face-to-face was the first type of communication to be implemented. The participants state that informal communication in the form of face-to-face conversation is the most popular and valuable form of communication used in the formation of a successful rural partnership. The conversations can happen at the technical center, the business, and anywhere else in the community. For example, these interactions can take place on the golf course, in a grocery store, at a high school football game, at rotary meetings, in a restaurant, or at a coffee shop.

The workforce development practitioners communicate externally through written communication. The participants expressed that written communication is primarily
through e-mail and partners do not think it is the best way of communicating externally with a partner. Written communication seems to be reserved for formal and/or impersonal communication. The formal communication was expressed to be about such topics as grants or curriculum. In both case studies there is CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software used to send out updates and newsletters to the existing partners. This is impersonal communication, which partner’s state supports the partnership by updating partners.

The participants from these two successful partnerships indicated in their interviews that they communicate externally with partners mostly face-to-face. However, they indicated that there is also a place for written communication externally with the partners. The participants described the styles of communication changing as the partnership moved towards sustainability. The forward movement in partnerships moved to include more formal written communication. The written communication was described as formalizing the processes that connect the two organizations together.

**Conclusion.** The completed study reveals that elements of social capital and communication are required to address the needs of partnering organizations. The participants in this study understand that there are motivating needs that they have to tend to in regard to the other organization. Meeting the needs is a motivation of each partner. Participants agree that having a pulse on the other organization by gaining information and understanding their needs is necessary. As a communicative practice, listening supports keeping a pulse on the partnership. Further, personal links in the partnership are strengthened through relationships and trust. The personal relationships and trust are strengthened through engaging in face-to-face communication. Signposts also emerge
from an analysis of the data; signposts include outcomes and a formalization process (i.e. grants, curriculum, and business processes). The communication is also a signpost, specifically looking at when formal communication is incorporated with the already prevalent informal communication. Chapter 5 will further discuss at length, connections between the findings and the relevant literature. The chapter will also offer recommendations for future practices for workforce development practitioners with partnership formation.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the formation of partnerships between rural community college technical centers and businesses. The themes that emerged from the study are the motivations, the elements of social capital, and communication. I utilized a collective case study methodology, examining the partnerships of two technical centers at community colleges in Michigan. I collected data through interviews, documents (i.e. pamphlets, marketing materials), and observations of happenings on the center (i.e. tour of centers, spending time at both centers).

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study are discussed in conjunction with ideas from the conceptual framework and literature review. The goal of this research is to provide community colleges and businesses concepts to use as a lens with which to examine their ongoing partnership formation processes. The findings are compared with the literature to illustrate these concepts with the practices that happen during the formation of the partnerships between technical centers and businesses. Chapter 5 connects the findings of the research with the literature, illustrating “beyond the facts to the meaning they reflect, the questions they raise, the ideas to which they point, and the practical uses and value they have for the extension of knowledge” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 87). The concepts that emerged from the case studies are motivation, social capital, and communication as a key support.
Figure 5. Model of Partnership Formation between Technical Centers and Businesses.
Model of partnership formation between technical centers and businesses.

The concepts in this figure are a combination of the research findings from this study and the concepts offered by past models and research. The past models are the Partnership Development Model (Amey et al., 2007) on page 22 and the Social Capital in Partnerships model (Eddy, 2010b) on page 30. The social capital gears and the feedback loops are drawn from the Social Capital in Partnerships model (Eddy, 2010b). In the figure when one element of social capital spins so do the others and this increases the overall strength of the partnership. For example, if a workforce development dean is able to be central in a partnership this individual will also be able to obtain more information. As the centrality gear, as a form of social capital, spins forward in the model so will the information gear. Additions from this research to the social capital model are the concepts inside the gray arrows that surround the gears to support the social capital: understanding, listening, and face-to-face communication. The supportive elements also help to grow the other forms of social capital. For example, as listening in the feedback loop is utilized it supports information and as this form of social capital spins so do density and centrality. These arrows emerged as concepts that support elements of social capital. The social capital gears move the partnership process forward through their interlocking teeth with the top and bottom arrows.

The arrow with teeth at the top of the model illustrates the movement from informal communication to incorporating formal communication. The arrow moves from white to grey (and not black) to indicate that informal face-to-face communication is not replaced, but added to with formal and written communication. The arrow at the bottom of the model with teeth illustrates the formation process from development to
sustainability. The arrow is shaded from left to right to illustrate the process moving forward with no distinct line where one “phase” begins and one ends. The process of the alignment of the various motivations happens throughout the formation process. The arrow of motivation moves from left to right from individual motivations to shared motivations as the partnership forms. The various motivations as long as they are aligned can change through the formation process. The message to the partners regarding motivation aids in the alignment process by remaining clear and continuous throughout the partnership formation. A clear and unified message was a support to the development and alignment of motivation in these cases.

**Motivation.** The people in these organizations are motivated to begin, develop, and sustain partnerships. The motivations in the partnerships can change as long as there is still alignment between the two organizations. These motivations need to remain aligned between the organizations for the partnership to continue. The partners have various motivations and needs in a partnership, such as resources, training, outlook of the industry, and personal relationships. There are distinctions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that also play a part in the formation of these two partnerships. This section has various motivations (potential in area of training, training needs, resources, and personal relationships), intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and mission alignment.

**Various motivations.** Partners have many different motivations when developing a partnership (Russell & Flynn, 2000). Although very specific motivations emerge from the case studies, many other motivations are also possible, such as legislative drive and sharing in the risk. The motivations of the partnerships are antecedents and influence the
partnership formation (Eddy, 2010b). The motivations of the Greenridge and Treetops partnerships are connected with the literature.

*Potential in area of training.* The technical centers are not just motivated to develop a training program for any business that was interested in partnering. The training program must be connected to a field that has a positive outlook for economic growth. This means there are positions for students upon completing a program or that training will improve skills in a position they already hold. The participants in both of the partnerships talked about the needs for training in their organizations as well as the outlook of their industries as positive. In the Greenridge case, the wind industry is very popular in the area, and there are multiple successful companies in need of employees. In the Treetops case, there is the one business, Electrical Incorporated, which needed to train their current employees on electrical technology. The technical centers were both convinced that these industries are worth the investment of their time, energy, and resources towards.

*Training needs.* Businesses are motivated to improve the skills of their employees (Dougherty & Bakia, 2000). The findings in this research illustrate that the businesses are also looking for trained individuals specialized in their areas to hire. In the Treetops case, Colin (President of Electrical Incorporated) stated that the technical center is willing to work with him to develop a curriculum around the electrical field for his employees. He indicated that the college noticed a market for the training, and they were open to pushing forward with the partnership. In the Greenridge case Jessie (General Manager at Just Right Manufacturing) indicated that she looked for good employees that were trained that may not have worked for her in the past. The company had a difficult
time keeping trained employees in their rural area. The technical centers are motivated for students to train in these highly technical fields. As such, both the businesses and technical centers involved are a good fit in this regard.

**Resources.** The need for resources creates a motivation for organizations to partner (Amey et al., 2010; Eckel & Hartley, 2008). Illene (President) and Harold (Director of the Technical Center) in the Greenridge case talked about the area of their community college as one that is rural, in need of resources, and suffering from poverty. These antecedents of poverty make resources valuable. At Treetops, the participants did not mention poverty in their community, but they did mention the contract training side of the technical center that works towards the goal of receiving much needed funding for training. Samuel (Director of Academics in Technical Areas) stated that there are grants that allowed the community college to help Electrical Incorporated offset their taxes to continue training with the Treetops Technical Center. Colin said that this is one of the reasons that the partnership was able to continue, and he was motivated by outcomes (i.e. trained employees, grant money) that helped push towards sustainability.

**Personal relationships.** Personal relationships are also a motivation to create a partnership (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et al., 2007; Orr, 2001). The participants in this study described other people in the partnerships as friends or at least as having respect for one another. In the Greenridge Case, participants described close relationships as part of living in a rural community. Eddy (2007) indicated that leaders from rural community colleges are often recognized on campus and in the larger community, out golfing or at the grocery store. The close relationships in the community provide a dense network making the social capital available to the potential partners.
stronger. In the Treetops case, the town where the college is located is not as rural as the Greenridge case. The town is large enough that potential partners might not see each other in public places often. Although the relationship process may have been a little different in the Greenridge and Treetops case, the participants were motivated by their relationships with each other to form these partnerships.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The Partnership Development Model (Amey et al., 2007) illustrates motivation as an antecedent to partnerships. The various motivations in these two partnerships that were mentioned in the previous section can be intrinsic or extrinsic. The extrinsic motivations pushed the partnership forward if they aligned with the other organization’s motivations. The extrinsic and intrinsic motivations can be distinguished by economics and altruism (Eddy, 2010b; Eddy & Amey, 2014).

The partners are motivated by the funding that comes from the partnership, whether it is resources or money from a grant. The participants in the Greenridge case spoke about the materials that they were able to receive from being in the partnership. Both the Greenridge and Treetops participants described the benefits of money that came from grants that motivated them to partner. The partnering of organizations is an economic choice for both the technical centers and the businesses.

On the other side, there is altruism to help the community and businesses. Responsibility is one of the intrinsic motivations involved in the partnerships. Justin (Wind Grants Coordinator at Greenridge) talked about their responsibility:

If we don’t get this up and running, you know, we can look at a lot higher unemployment rate than 13.5% coming up, or, you know, one example, a company shut down because they could not find enough people to do the work.
This is one example of the intrinsic motivations that are involved in the partnerships. Many of the participants expressed that they were also motivated to do the work itself and find it gratifying to help the community and businesses. The technical center participants talked more about the altruistic nature of the work than on the business side of the partnership.

Motivation alignment. The community colleges are motivated to help the businesses with training because doing so aligns with the colleges’ missions of helping the community (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et al., 2007; Dougherty & Bakia, 2000, Orr, 2001). Mission is a motivation for the technical centers in this study. As Illene pointed out regarding the mission: “it’s the community in community college.” The technical centers sought to align with partnering businesses that had training needs. Jessie pointed out that the partnership has to “align with everybody’s needs.” The alignment of missions and goals is a motivation for community colleges to partner (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et al., 2007; Orr, 2001). In the Treetops case, participants talked about the partnership as a win-win, being on the same page, and synergy. This language used by the participants illustrates the alignment that happened in the formation of this partnership.

As the literature suggests, these two partnerships illustrated various motivations that needed to align with both the technical centers and the businesses in order to create a sustainable partnership. Various motivations in these specific partnerships include potential in area of training, training needs, resources, and personal relationships. The literature also split motivation into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Both types of motivation were present in these partnerships. The partnerships would not have been
successful if the motivations between the technical centers and businesses did not align. Social capital is often utilized to address the motivations. In both case studies, the partnerships focused on social capital.

**Elements of social capital.** The Social Capital in Partnerships model (Eddy, 2010b) helps to reflect on the findings from this study. This model considers density, information, centrality, trust, and feedback loops (Eddy 2010b). The findings that emerged from the data suggest that successful rural partnerships rely on close relationships, trust, information, and understanding. The findings in this study corroborate previous research discussed in the literature review.

The pulse is checked through the links by gaining information and understanding. The links are strengthened through trust and personal relationships. Finally, the workings of social capital in a partnership are an active process for the workforce development practitioners. This section includes the five themes around social capital in the partnerships: (a) close relationships (density), (b) information, (c) understanding (feedback loop), (d) decision makers and champions are central, and (e) trust. These themes are in-line with past literature (Eddy, 2010b).

**Close relationships.** The participants in these two case studies described their communities as close; they also indicated that there were close relationships among people in the partnerships. The theme of close relationships links to the social capital concept density. Close relationships indicate a high density network whereas a low density network would be illustrated by a group of acquaintances (Eddy, 2010b; Granovetter, 1983). The people involved in these two partnerships moved beyond
acquaintances, oftentimes before the partnership even started. Participants described their communities as very tightly knit.

The participants in the Greenridge case who were familiar with suburban or urban areas described their rural communities as having a higher density, because they would meet at events in the community or in everyday situations. Closer relationships support trust, norms, and unified action (Amey et al. 2010; Coleman, 1988). The two case studies align with the research. The relationships between the individuals in the partnerships built trust. The participants in the Treetops case described honesty as part of the formation of the partnership, where the technical center was honest about the training they could provide. As such, when Colin expressed his expectation of the partnership, the technical center could refer him to other community resources to meet the need they could not. The honesty helped to build trust and norms that each side of the partnership could rely on to have action that was going in the same direction.

Building strong ties is costly for an organization and takes resources (Rowley, Behrens, & Krackhardt, 2000). It takes a lot of energy and time to build and maintain relationships that result in shared understanding. In the Greenridge case, Gillespie (Director of Corporate Training at Treetops) expressed that these relationships grow over time. It also takes more time to meet with someone for a cup of coffee than it does to send an e-mail, but these participants know the power of building and maintaining relationships. They have found the value in developing these close relationships because they know that their partnerships depend on it.

**Information.** Information is valuable (Coleman, 1988). The information helps both organizations in the partnership to be able to check the pulse of the larger
community culture, the culture of each other’s institutions, and the culture developing within the partnership. The exchange of information between the technical centers and businesses is a form of social capital. Network ties are a channel for information to travel through (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1988). The relationships are links in these two partnerships allowing each side of the partnership to receive information. The organizations involved in the partnership share information and have knowledge of the partnering organization while still acting separately from that organization and maintaining the partnership (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). As the cross case analysis suggests, the relationship links are utilized to disseminate and consequently understand information in the partnership. In the literature review three benefits of information appear, which are also evident in the findings from the case studies. The three benefits of information are access, timing, and referrals (Burt, 1997).

Access to information is available through the links of the relationships (Burt, 1997). The access allows each partner to reach outcomes that they are seeking. The access to this information allows the technical center to develop relevant curriculum for the business and community. Theo explained that they need access to the information because without it “we can’t gather information about welding, we don’t know if we need to build a program.” Access to information also allows the organizations to keep a pulse on one another while the information also determines the direction of the partnership.

The timing of information is a benefit to the organizations and the partnership (Burt, 1997). The participants in both cases indicated that the timing of information has a part in partnership formation. If the business cannot communicate their needs to the center in a timely manner and the center cannot react and produce, the businesses will
lose out on a competitive edge; thereby negatively impacting the technical centers and the relevancy of the training. In the high-tech industries within which these technical centers and businesses work, the timeliness of information will direct the path of the partnership.

Both partnerships utilized referrals from each other during the formation of the partnership. The referrals that are received are filtered through information (Burt, 1997). In the Greenridge case, Just Right Manufacturing received referrals, and they also expect referrals on which new graduates to hire. In the Treetops case, the Technical Center received referrals for students to take part in the training. In both of these cases referrals provided information that helped the partnership move forward.

**Understanding.** The literature review illustrates that understanding is an important element of partnerships, but there are not specific details on how understanding works in the partnerships. Sink and Jackson (2002) offer survey research pointing out that understanding is one element marked most often as signifying a partnership. The understanding in a partnership helps the participants keep a pulse on information about motivations, needs, and status of the partnership.

Understanding in the partnership is of value to these rural-serving technical centers and their partnering businesses. Amey (2007) indicates that shared understanding comes before a successful partnership can take place. Illene indicated that the businesses express to her that Harold the Director of the Technical Center helps the partners feel understood, which makes her happy. She also expressed that the business partners stated “[Harold’s] one of us; he understands what we are saying.” In the Greenridge Partnership, Theo (Director of Placement) talked about understanding as essential to making sure what is created is what is wanted. Justin stated something similar in that
understanding has to exist on both sides of the partnership. So, the college understands the needs of the businesses, and the businesses understand what the technical centers are capable of producing.

In the Treetops partnership, participants explained that the technical center had to understand what the business wanted because this would guide how they developed training. The participants went into detail on understanding the needs of the partners. The mutual understanding of goals in a partnership leads to success (Amey, 2010).

Through understanding the needs of the business, the college was able to develop training and curriculum. There is also an understanding on both sides of the partnerships that the technical centers needs students to fill courses.

**Decision makers and champions are central.** The centrality of a person in the partnerships gives them influence on decision making powers to begin and continue the collaborative effort. The centrality of a person is determined by their proximity to decision makers (Eddy, 2010b). These champions are central communicators and influence decision-making in the partnership (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et al., 2007, Eddy, 2010b). The participants in this study described champions as being in the middle of the partnership, either as the decision maker or a person that has a close connection to the decision maker. Champions impact the development and sustainability of the partnership.

Illene the decision maker for Greenridge Community College indicated that she has a role in which she is central to the partnership. She stated she relies on Harold to tell her when to become involved in the partnership. She explained her active role in the partnerships:
I mean, if I’m not there with enough frequency in front of the business and industry to say—to extol what we’re doing, to ask again for their reinforcement or their expression of need, they’re going to think that they don’t rise to that level of importance.

Harold is very close to Illene and the business partners, which makes him central to key decision makers. Jessie stated that these central players have “energy and passion.”

Harold is central in the network where he is linked with the greatest number of individuals in the partnership. The social capital that Harold possesses draws him closer to the central decision makers. Watson’s (2007) research also illustrates that an individual can build social capital to be close to the central decision makers. This was the case with Harold who has built social capital and was thus able to be close to the President of the college and local business leaders, such as Jessie, that were involved in the partnership. Justin said: “where [businesses] might not answer the phone for me and Theo, they answer for Harold, absolutely.”

Colin is central in the Treetops partnership, and Samuel, keeps a pulse on him through feedback loops to ensure the technical center is going in the right direction with the partnership. Colin is (President of Electrical Incorporated) the decision maker for his organization. He is also the champion of the partnership. According to participants, Colin pushed for the partnership. Samuel is also central in the partnership and built a strong relationship with Colin, gaining both information and trust. The relationship between Colin and Samuel is a central relationship in this partnership.

The champion communicates the benefits of the partnership so people know the importance of the partnership (Amey, 2010; Amey et al., 2010; Amey et al., 2007).
Greenridge Technical Center, Harold took on this responsibility. He described the benefits to the college, the students, the businesses, and the community. In the Treetops case, Colin described the benefits to his organization and the employees, which in turn benefited the Treetops Technical Center by marketing their training program. The champion’s network influences the partnership process.

**Trust.** Participants identified trust as the base on which a partnership operates. Previous scholarly research also indicates that trust is a characteristic of a successful partnership (Dhillon, 2007). The trust in Greenridge and Treetops partnerships strengthened the relationships and allowed partners to exchange more information and resources. Trust in successful partnerships develops social capital. In turn, the trust is a resource (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Participants expressed the importance of trust in the champions of the partnership. The feedback loop in the Eddy (2010b) model is a representation of the trust a person is able to build with the champion. For example, participants trusted Harold and Colin. The trust built by these champions or other individuals in the partnership helped them to become more central to the decision makers. As the case studies illustrate, when there is trust, there is the more cooperation (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In the Greenridge and Treetops cases there was a willingness to cooperate with the decision makers and champions more than any other individuals involved in the partnerships. As discussed previously, they also gained and disseminated information. The more trust the participants builds the more access they have to resources and decision makers.
**Communication is a key support.** Communication in partnerships supports the overall partnership, motivations, and social capital. Communication also allows participants opportunities to understand the motivations, goals, and benefits of the partners (Amey et al., 2010). The participants can build commitment to the partnership through communication (Elving, 2005). This section elaborates on five sub-themes regarding communication that emerged from the cases: (a) internal communication is supportive, (b) the message is clear and unified, (c) listening is a priority, (d) informal communication and face-to-face communication, and (e) formal communication and incorporating written communication.

**Internal communication is supportive.** Both the technical centers and organizations had to change the way that they did business in order to accommodate a partnership. For example, the technical centers (with partnership resources) had to develop a new curriculum and acquire up-to-date machines. Internal communication allows partners to integrate these changes into their business process (Eddy, 2010b; Elving, 2005). The changes from forming a partnership mean that there were changes within the technical centers to accommodate the business’s needs. The internal communication supported these changes in the Greenridge and Treetops case.

Internal support is needed if partnerships are to be successful (Forde, 2002). All participants interviewed indicated they were supported in their endeavors to create the partnership. The leaders need to support and communicate with the other partnership participants (Elving, 2005; Madsen, Miller, and John, 2005). In the Treetops case the support from leaders was not a topic that was brought up in the interviews, but there was explanation of communication with partnership participants. In the Greenridge case,
many of the participants talked about Illene supporting the partnerships and willingness to be supportive. Illene expressed that internal communication is very complex. This complexity requires support from people high in the hierarchy.

**The message is clear and unified.** The participants communicate a message that expresses information to partners about the partnership (Eddy, 2010b). The technical centers in these two cases send a message of being connective to businesses. Eddy (2010a) states that communication can be connective and accentuate “understanding, empathy, acceptance, and collaboration” (p. 327). Both case studies exemplify Eddy’s observation. The technical centers send communication that they are interested in understanding the needs of the businesses in industries with positive growth outlooks. Although they have deeper motivations, they express one message to the businesses. The businesses express their needs, which are various but centralize on the need for training and education. They mutually communicate about the resources available, which can motivate partners to stay in the partnership. To further build commitment, the message sent to the partner must help the partnership (Amey, 2010). The partners in both case studies expressed their motivations and needs to see if their goals aligned with the need to further build the commitment between the two organizations. Both sides of the partnership must listen to these needs.

**Listening is a priority.** One important factor leading to a successful partnership is listening (Russell & Flynn, 2000), which in the model is part of the feedback loop. Interview participants talked about listening to the partners as supporting the partnership and other specific elements within the partnership formation. Listening supports partnership formation (Eddy, 2010b). Kouzes and Posner (2007) state that “if you want
people to trust you, and if you want to build a climate of trust in your organization [partnership], the listening-to-talking ratio has to be in favor of listening” (p. 245). The listening that takes place during the formation of a partnership also supports elements of social capital within the partnership. In these two rural partnerships, participants expressed that listening allowed them to keep a pulse on the partnership and understand the needs of the partner through information. This communication element is vital to the progress of a partnership. If the technical centers fail at listening and finding the pulse of the business partners and community, they are likely to fail at forming a partnership.

**Informal communication and face-to-face communication.** The participants in both cases described a majority of communication that happens in the successful rural partnership between technical centers and businesses as informal and face-to-face. Both the Greenridge and Treetops partnerships utilize these types of communication. Informal communication is voluntary and does not have to focus on work but instead focuses on social relationships (Fay, 2011). Social relationships in both partnerships included conversations that moved beyond the work. These social relationships can have a positive influence on the work (Fay, 2011). The participants talked about these informal interactions as necessary to the partnership formation process.

Informal communication is more believable than formal communication (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998). Without the informal communication in these rural partnerships the individuals would not believe in one another. In the two partnerships, face-to-face informal communication helped to build belief with the partner. The belief in the partner further built trust with these individuals. Talking to external partners is a sign that the people are reinforcing a relationship that further helps the partnership. The
business partners and technical centers both wanted face-to-face communication to take place and recognized the necessity of this type of communication.

**Formal communication and incorporating written communication.** Formal communication in the partnerships follows the chain of command and organizational hierarchy (Johnson et al, 1994). The direction of the communication is indicative of formal communication. These directions can be looked at internally and externally. The directions of formal communication are downward, upward, and horizontal (Guffey, 2013). Downward communication is represented by the communication from Illene and Phyllis (Vice President at Treetops) to the different employees within the technical centers that they oversee as community college leaders. Upward communication is exemplified by Harold communicating with Illene and Samuel and Gillespie communicating with Phyllis. Horizontal communication exists between the partners (technical center and business); despite an individual’s level or position in the hierarchy of their own organization, it appears there is more of a level playing field when crossing organizations. So, communication between Colin and Samuel, even though Colin is the president of his organization and Samuel is a director of the technical center, is more equal than it would be if Colin and Samuel worked in the same organization.

Formal communication is “officially transmitted information” (Price, 1997, p. 349). Between partners, the majority of information that is officially transmitted is expressed through written communication. As the partners incorporated written communication into the partnership, the participants described a shift from informal to formal communication. Written formal communication signifies outcomes and the
formalization of a partnership. Written communication is designated to formalize the partnership into the business processes of each of the partnering organizations.

**Limitations**

This study was completed in Michigan. This geographical location may not allow the findings to be generalized to all successful rural partnerships. The research provided a detailed description of the motivation, social capital, and communication involved in the formation of a successful rural partnership, but the findings may not pertain to urban or suburban contexts.

There was care to ensure against bias the research kept a journal of the analysis of each interview and the technical center visits. I graduated from a community college and I am employed by a community college although not in a workforce development capacity. I am also an advocate for community college education. The journal was analyzed to protect against bias that may happen during the research process.

There were a very limited number of participants from the business side. If there were more business participants interviewed this may have brought about more diverse findings. These findings may have offered a broader view of the business perspective of the workforce development offices in the formation of these partnerships.

There was a lack of access to many documents and observations. It may have been interesting if e-mails between the two partners were received as a form of data; this may have highlighted the content of the written communication. There were limited observations; including more of these may have brought about more nuances of the formation of the partnership. The observations included a tour and interactions between participants. More in depth observations would have added an interesting layer to this
research, such as attending a board meeting to see the technical center participants interacting with the business participants.

Finally, the case selection was identical for both cases, except for the selection of the case based on starting because of a grant or a relationship. Although, this was a part of selecting the cases, in the interviews it was described that both of the partnerships began because of relationships. A larger contrast between different institutions may have offered a difference in the formation of a partnership in different contexts. For instance, if there was one community college that was small and rural and one that was large and urban these contrasts may have extended beyond the findings from the past literature.

**Seven Recommendations for Practice**

The seven recommendations for practice that the case study results support are: (a) express the message, (b) keep a pulse on motivations, (c) value information, (d) determine who is central, (e) be honest and trustworthy, (f) request informal meetings, and (g) be mindful of communication. These overlapping ideas can be integrated into practice when building a partnership. These are practices that should be utilized in conjunction with the Partnership Development Model (Amey et al., 2007) and the Social Capital in Partnership Model (Eddy, 2010b). These recommendations all come with the prerequisite that there is internal support from the organization and the context is understood at all phases of the partnership, as the context can alter the direction and need for the partnership. The levels (partnership, organization, and individuals) exist within the larger context, so when the context changes so does everything else.
**Express the message.** On the sender side, each organization should take time to express their needs with each other. The message is the communication tool that each organization in a partnership can use to express their motivations. The participants sending the message need to understand their motivations and needs before expressing what the message. This message should also be unified, as it was in these two cases. Internally within each organization they should determine their overarching message. The message should also be simplified so it can be easily communicated. In these case studies, the partners expressed that they were open and wanted partnerships. There are a couple questions technical centers can ask:

- What is the message that is communicated to the partners?
- What does this message indicate about the motivations in the partnership?
- How is the message communicated to the partners?

**Keep a pulse on motivations.** On the receiver side, each organization needs to unearth and understand the needs that are communicated in order to determine if there is alignment of motivations between the two organizations. Listening in the feedback loop is the communication tool that can be used to help to keep a pulse on the motivations. This is a process that needs to happen frequently through the development in order to sustain the partnership. A partnership can change with the context, and these changes can be detrimental to the overall future of the partnership. There may be changes internally within and organization or the partnership, and either side may be able to offer resources that were not known at the beginning of the partnership. During the partnership development process there are questions about motivation to be asked:

- What are the motivations of the other organization?
• Do their motivations align with our motivations?
• Do their motivations align with our organizational processes?
• What are ways to keep a pulse on the partnership?
• What are techniques to better listen and understand the partner motivations?

**Value information.** Information is of high premium in a partnership and is a resource that can be used to strengthen a partnership. It is recommended that information is treated like currency or any other resource that is valued by the organization. The information itself is a resource but it can also be used to develop a program and find students for programs. The information is used to keep a pulse on a partnership but can bring feedback to the partnership as well. This information has allowed the technical centers in this study to understand the partnering organization, industries of strength, and developing a solid curriculum. Information has a value that cannot be held like other resources, such as materials or money, but there is value in pursuing this social capital. The questions that need to be asked regarding information are:

• What is the value of information from the partnership?
• Who has the information of value?
• How can information help forward the partnership?

**Determine who is central.** The decision makers and champions are central to the partnership and have access to the most capital. These individuals are in a place where they can gain the most information, and their understanding can determine the direction of the partnership. These individuals need to be supported in their movement forward to build the partnerships to work toward achieving the outcomes they are seeking. The
following questions can be asked to better understand who is central in the partnership
and how to support them:

- Who is the decision maker in your organization? In the partnering
  organization?
- Who is the champion of the partnership? What makes this person the
  champion?
- How can the decision makers and champions be supported?

**Be honest and trustworthy.** There needs to be honesty and trustworthiness in a
partnership. These are a foundation of a partnership; if this path is not taken the full
benefits of a partnership will be eluded. Trust is the bedrock of the partnership, and if it
is missing the rest of the activities that are taking place will not be executed to the fullest
capacity. The social capital gears will not spin, and there will be loss of centrality,
information, and density. In addition, there may be no partnership at all if there is not
trust as the foundation and resources will be wasted that could be used in another area.
The honesty and trustworthiness that the partners are able to see also bring about access
to building social capital but also the organizational capital. These questions can be
asked to aid in examining honesty and trustworthiness:

- What is the role of trust in the partnership?
- What are the benefits of trust?
- Is community college trusted in the community? How does this influence
  trust in the partnership?
- What happens if the trust is broken in the partnership? How can this be
  repaired?
**Request informal meetings.** Requesting informal meetings with decision makers or people central to the decision makers in the prospective or current partners is important to the partnership process. Requesting informal meetings enhances the social capital building that happens with face-to-face communication. A pragmatic step forward would be asking the partner out for a cup of coffee. If the meeting goes well, after the cup of coffee the college representative could invite them to take a tour of the technical center. This builds the strength of the relationship and while also utilizing informal communication (face-to-face). This is something that people in the rural technical centers describe as second nature in building a partnership; each person talked about the value of relationships. An e-mail and even a phone call cannot build the type of connection that can produce valuable information and resources. There is no substitute for meeting with a partner face-to-face for an informal conversation. Everyone is in a hurry and busy, but relationship building takes time. Informal communication and meeting in person pays off for the partnership builders. The strength of these links aid in the flow of information, how central a person is to the partnership, and the trust. The questions below can be asked to understand the personal relationships in the partnerships that technical centers are involved in:

- How are the relationships started? Maintained?
- Where is a good place to build rapport with the individual?
- What is the value of personal relationships in the partnership (i.e. resources, social capital, and friendship)?
- Can these relationships hinder the partnership?
Be mindful of communication

Pay attention to the type of communication and the benefits that stem from these acts. Also, by paying attention to the types of communication and frequency it can be a sign of where a partnership is in the formation process. Being mindful of the communication can help determine what types of communication are being sent and why they are being sent. Once formal communication is expressed in written form, it is integrated into the partnership. This is an indication of the formality of the partnership and the outcomes that come from these types of communication. There are some questions to ask when being mindful of communication such as:

- Is face-to-face communication present in the partnership? What does this mean in the partnership?
- What are the benefits of face-to-face communication?
- Is written communication present in the partnership? What does this mean in the partnership?
- What are the benefits of written communication?

Summary

There are seven recommendations for practice that have materialized from this research. The recommendations can help a rural technical center at a community college utilize tools that other partnerships have utilized. The recommendations revolve around understanding motivations, social capital, and communication to aid in the forward progress of these partnerships. The partnerships offer both organizations where they can share resources and apply for grants (that require partnerships) that help with the financial aspect of the partnership.
**Recommendations for Further Research**

There are many additional studies that could add to the literature on forming partnerships. Research is needed to confirm the current findings and also to expand the knowledge on what it takes to form a partnership. Further research can reinforce the ideas in the model to be useful for practitioners forming partnerships. As mentioned earlier in this study both of the rural partnerships began because of relationships which may alter how the partnerships were formed. The intention of this study was to examine one partnership that began because of a grant and another that began because of relationships.

Since both of these partnerships began because of relationships further research should examine the role of grants, such as the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant and how this may change the overall partnership formation. There is a large amount of funding tied to this grant and there will be great interest among policy makers, researchers, and practitioners regarding what make these partnerships successful. Social capital may have a different role in partnerships that begin because of grants like this rather than through prior relationships.

The future research might examine the idea of success in partnerships and the perceptions of those involved with the partnership. As the idea of success only was relevant in the case selection and was not a part of the overall partnership. The participants may not have agreed that they partnership was successful. As one individual stated, why did you choose that partnership, in a negative tone. The idea of success if very subjective and it will take a deeper look into the perceptions of these individuals to understand this concept, whereas sustainability is a more objective measure.
The concepts in this study (motivation, social capital, and communication) were only examined within successful partnerships in rural areas. There are a few directions that future research could examine regarding these three concepts. First, future research could examine how unsuccessful partnerships are tied to this model. Second, this study could also be replicated in suburban and urban areas in order to compare and contrast different contexts. The contextual factors may change the motivations and how the overall partnership is supported. The elements of social capital and communication may take on a different role in suburban and urban partnerships.

In this research study there was only one person from each business interviewed. A further study may examine the partnership from the business perspective; this may yield information regarding their preferences which may give community colleges a better idea on what businesses are looking for in successful partnerships. Future research could also access more players from each side of the partnership to give a more balanced understanding from both sides of the partnership. This further examination can offer researchers and practitioners a better idea on the perspectives of the partnerships between technical centers and businesses.

The research in the future may also examine non-technical center departments and the internal communication and social capital needed within the community college to develop and sustain successful partnerships. These technical centers have a certain amount of independence that other departments at community colleges may not have and are not always linked to credit based education. The relationships with other departments in the college were not mentioned as important by participants of this study, whereas it may be for other non-technical center departments. The Greenridge Technical Center
benefited from internal support of leadership, for example from Illene (she helped write a grant for the technical center and an actively helped build relationships with businesses), but in the Treetops case there was not much internal support mentioned. There needs to be more research on the social capital and communication that happens internally and how this may play a part in the formation of partnerships.

**Conclusion**

This study was developed in order to better understand how partnerships are formed between rural technical centers at community colleges and businesses. The purpose of this research is to understand the process of the formation of successful partnerships between workforce development offices [technical centers] at rural community colleges and businesses with an attention on motivation, social capital in partnerships, and the communication of the workforce development practitioners that occurs internally with stakeholders and externally with partners.

Two case studies of successful rural partnerships between technical centers at community colleges and businesses were completed. The findings illustrate that there were motivations and needs that the technical centers sought to fulfill by joining a partnership. The elements of social capital were a resource, from the relationships that the participants built to be able to be used to reach for ways to fill these needs. The communication that was utilized in the formation of a partnership supported the participants in expressing the needs, listening supported the pulse, face-to-face communication was able to support the relationships, and incorporating formal written communication was a signpost that the partnership was moving towards sustainability.
The elements of social capital are a resource that both technical centers and businesses can use when building their partnerships. The relationships and communication that happen support the direction and process of partnership formation between the rural technical centers and the businesses. Leaders need to understand and value the relationships and communication as a way to build resources and promote this among their employees. The loss of social capital and failing communication counteracts the energy and time it takes to build a successful partnership. This study can help future rural partnerships to influence the direction of a partnership between technical centers and industry.
REFERENCES


http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/


http://quickfacts.census.gov/


Community College Times (2011). $2B training program focuses on trade-impacted workers, partnerships. Retrieved from
http://www.communitycollegeetimes.com/Pages/

Government/TAΑ_grants.aspx


APPENDIX A

Invitations to Participate in Study for Workforce Development Professionals

Dear __________,

My name is Ryan Nausieda. I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University in the school of Educational Leadership with a focus on Higher Education.

I am completing research as part of a dissertation. I would like to invite you to take part in this research. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview for no longer that 1 ½ hours. If you decided to take part in the study, you will be asked questions about your position, partnerships you have been involved in, motivation, relationships, and communication.

I would like to invite you to talk on the phone about the study requirements.

The purpose of this research is to understand the process of the formation of successful partnerships between workforce development offices at rural community colleges and businesses with an attention on motivation, social capital in partnerships, and the communication of the workforce development practitioners that occurs internally with stakeholders and externally with partners. A requirement to participate in this dissertation research is that you are employed by a community college in a workforce development capacity and your office must be involved in a successful partnership with a business, which:

* Is sustainable (i.e., partners wish to continue working together, sufficient resources can be generated to continue operations).
* Is viewed positively by all partners, which may be due to a variety of reasons, but would generally include the perception that the collaboration was useful and productive.
* Generates positive outcomes in accordance with the goals and purposes of the collaborative entity.
* Creates a means of open and equal communication and decision making.
* Provides an improved mechanism to achieve common purposes more readily (e.g., more efficiently, at reduced cost, with better quality) through partnership than alone. (Russell and Flynn, 2000, p. 200)

The interview will be conducted by Ryan Nausieda in an office within the community college where you work. In this location, you will spend up to 1 ½ hours answering questions asked by the interviewer which will be audiotaped.

You will be asked fourteen questions regarding motivation, communication, social capital, and partnerships. There will be an interview protocol that will utilize as well as probing questions.
There are no known risks in this study. There is a possibility of risks that are unforeseen. Ryan Nausieda will be on hand if you have any questions. Your identity will only be known in as much as you will sign an informed consent document and your voice will be on an audio tape.

The benefits of the study will be to the education discipline. This study could offer greater understanding as to workforce development offices at community colleges relationships and communication during the formation of a partnership. Perhaps more interesting is the opportunity to understand the experience of the partnerships using a relationship and communication perspective. Persons that take part in partnerships may benefit from knowing what relationship concepts and communication practices the offices are using.

Only the principal researcher and the student investigator will have access to the information collected. All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means your name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The results of the study could be presented at a conference or published. Steps will be taken to protect your identity. This involves the use of pseudonyms for you and the location of the community college or business in which you work.

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either professionally or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the co-primary investigator, Ryan Nausieda at (517) 526-7636 or ryan.r.nausieda@wmich.edu. You may also contact the primary investigator, Andrea Beach at (269) 387-1725 or andrea.beach@wmich.edu.
Invitations to Participate in Study for Other Participants (i.e. Workforce Development Professionals Workforce Development Dean and Directors, College Presidents, Internal Stakeholders (community college leaders, instructors), Business Partners)

Dear __________, 

My name is Ryan Nausieda. I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University in the school of Educational Leadership with a focus on Higher Education.

I am completing research as part of a dissertation. I would like to invite you to take part in this research. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me for an interview for no longer that 1 ½ hours. If you decided to take part in the study, you will be asked questions about your position, partnerships you have been involved in, motivation, relationships, and communication.

The purpose of this research is to understand the process of the formation of successful partnerships between workforce development offices at rural community colleges and businesses with an attention on motivation, social capital in partnerships, and the communication of the workforce development practitioners that occurs internally with stakeholders and externally with partners. A requirement to participate in this dissertation is that you are involved with a successful partnership between a community college and a business, which:

* Is sustainable (i.e., partners wish to continue working together, sufficient resources can be generated to continue operations).
* Is viewed positively by all partners, which may be due to a variety of reasons, but would generally include the perception that the collaboration was useful and productive.
* Generates positive outcomes in accordance with the goals and purposes of the collaborative entity.
* Creates a means of open and equal communication and decision making.
* Provides an improved mechanism to achieve common purposes more readily (e.g., more efficiently, at reduced cost, with better quality) through partnership than alone. (Russell and Flynn, 2000, p. 200)

The interview will be conducted by Ryan Nausieda in an office where you work. In this location, you will spend up to 1 ½ hours answering questions asked by the interviewer which will be audiotaped.
You will be asked fourteen questions regarding motivation, communication, social capital, and partnerships. There will be an interview protocol that will utilize as well as probing questions.

There are no known risks in this study. There is a possibility of risks that are unforeseen. Ryan Nausieda will be on hand if you have any questions. Your identity will only be known in as much as you will sign an informed consent document and your voice will be on an audio tape.

The benefits of the study will be to the education discipline. This study could offer greater understanding as to workforce development offices at community colleges relationships and communication during the formation of a partnership. Perhaps more interesting is the opportunity to understand the experience of the partnerships using a relationship and communication perspective. Persons that take part in partnerships may benefit from knowing what relationship concepts and communication practices the offices are using.

Only the principal researcher and the student investigator will have access to the information collected. All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means your name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The results of the study could be presented at a conference or published. Steps will be taken to protect your identity. This involves the use of pseudonyms for you and the location of the community college or business in which you work.

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either professionally or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the co-primary investigator, Ryan Nausieda at (517) 526-7636 or ryan.r.nausieda@wmich.edu. You may also contact the primary investigator, Andrea Beach at (269) 387-1725 or andrea.beach@wmich.edu.

With kind regards,
Ryan Nausieda
APPENDIX B

Data Sources

Interview Participants
1. Workforce Development Professionals
2. Workforce Development Dean and Directors
3. College Presidents
4. Business Partners
5. Administrative Assistant

Document Analysis
1. Newsletters
2. Marketing materials
3. College and Technical Center Websites
4. Online Materials (i.e. articles written about the partnership)

Observations
1. Tour of Center
2. Observations of Daily Activities from Day on Center
### APPENDIX C

### Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Questions</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Partnership Formation**<br>(Research Questions 1, 1a) | 1. From the very beginning, tell me about the process in starting the partnership with_________. **Probes:** Are the original individuals still involved? What was your role in the development of the partnership?  
2. What were motivations to partner with __________? **Probes:** What were motivations of your organization in joining the partnership? Did anyone in the college have differing motivations than you? What were the businesses motivations? What are the motivations to keep the partnership going?  
3. What are the key components of making the partnership successful? **Probe:** Why is it still successful?  |
| **Social Capital**<br>(Research Question 1b) | 4. Tell me a story about how each of the people involved in the formation of the partnership relate to one another. **Probes:** Are the people in the partnership friends? How do you think their relationships played a part in the formation of this partnership?  
5. What role has information played in the partnership? **Probes:** What benefits have come from information gleaned from this partnership (i.e. access, early timing, and referrals)?  
6. Who is the champion of this partnership? **Probes:** What makes them the champion? How does the champion influence the partnership?  
7. What is the role of trust in partnership formation? **Probes:** Can you give an example of how trust played a role in the formation of the partnership?  |
| **Communication**<br>(Research Questions 2, 2a,2b) | 8. What forms of communication did you see during the formation of this partnership? **Probes:** Internally? Externally? Formal? Informal?  
9. What are some of the communication practices that work best for you during the formation of this partnership? **Probes:** Internally? Externally?  
10. What messages does the champion (you) intend to get across when developing a partnership? **Probe:** How does the champion communicate these messages?  
11. What metaphor (or symbol) would you use to describe the
development of a partnership?

Closing Questions
12. How are other partnerships different to this one? **Probe:** How are other partnerships you are involved in similar to this one?
13. What advice would you offer to other community colleges who wanted to form a successful partnership?
14. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not talked about regarding the formation of successful partnerships?
APPENDIX D

Consent Form

Western Michigan University
Educational Leadership

Principal Investigator: Dr. Andrea Beach
Student Investigator: Ryan Nausieda
Title of Study: Formation of Successful Partnerships between Community College Workforce Development Offices and Businesses

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Formation of Successful Partnerships between Rural Community College Workforce Development Offices and Businesses.” This project will serve as Ryan Nausieda’s dissertation for the requirements of a doctoral degree at Western Michigan University. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

The purpose of this research is to understand the process of the formation of successful partnerships between workforce development offices at rural community colleges and businesses with an attention on motivation, social capital in partnerships, and the communication of the workforce development practitioners that occurs internally with stakeholders and externally with partners. A requirement to participate in this dissertation is that you are involved with a successful partnership between a community college and a business. The interview will be conducted by Ryan Nausieda in an office where you work. In this location, participants will spend up to 1 ½ hours answering questions asked by the interviewer which will be audiotaped.

You will be asked fourteen questions regarding motivation, communication, social capital, and partnerships. There will be an interview protocol that will utilize as well as probing questions.

There are no known risks in this study. There is a possibility of risks that are unforeseen. Ryan Nausieda will be on hand if you have any questions. Your identity will only be known in as much as you will sign an informed consent document and your voice will be on an audio tape.

The benefits of the study will be to the education discipline. This study could offer greater understanding as to workforce development offices at community colleges relationships and communication during the formation of a partnership. Perhaps more interesting is the opportunity to understand the experience of the partnerships using a relationship and communication perspective. Persons that take part in partnerships may
benefit from knowing what relationship concepts and communication practices the offices are using.

There are no costs associated with participating in this study. There will be no compensation received for participating in the study.

Only the principal researcher and the student investigator will have access to the information collected. All of the information collected from you is confidential. That means your name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The results of the study could be presented at a conference or published. Steps will be taken to protect your identity. This involves the use of pseudonyms for you and the location of the community college in which you work.

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either professionally or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the co-primary investigator, Ryan Nausieda at (517) 526-7636 or ryan.r.nausieda@wmich.edu. You may also contact the primary investigator, Andrea Beach at (269) 387-1725 or andrea.beach@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

___________________________________
Participant’s signature

___________________________________
Date
Date: September 23, 2013

To: Andrea Beach, Principal Investigator
    Ryan Nausieda, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: Approval not needed for HSIRB Project Number 13-09-33

This letter will serve as confirmation that your project titled “Formation of Successful Partnerships Between Rural Community College Workforce Development Offices and Businesses” has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). Based on that review, the HSIRB has determined that approval is not required for you to conduct this project because you are business partnerships and not collecting personal identifiable (private) information about individuals.

Thank you for your concerns about protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects.

A copy of your protocol and a copy of this letter will be maintained in the HSIRB files.