

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Catherine L. Porter for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education presented on
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Title: An Examination of Organizational Fluidity and Workplace Quality in a
Community College Setting: An Internal Multi-Stakeholder Perspective

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Community colleges today are experiencing monumental shifts in their operating environments. Some of these changes are known, but many of them are not. They include shifts in curriculum, funding, and societal expectation to name a few. Through the constructs of high quality work environment and organizational fluidity theory, this research explored pathways of understanding toward developing holistic strategies of sustainably building institutional capacity to creatively and innovatively mitigate changes in the operating environment.

This quasi-experimental single case study utilized existing organizational fluidity and high quality work environment Likert scales delivered in a semi-structured interview format. Conclusions derived from these findings were four fold: a) Organizational structures existed at the participant community college that may be barriers to achieving the desired fluid state. b) Insufficient internal formal and informal communication college wide coupled with lack of consistent college-wide strategic alignment created

significant confusion for internal stakeholders. c) The high degree of workplace quality perceived at the college could potentially support further progress toward realizing a fluid operating state. d) For high quality workplace and organizational fluidity variables to more accurately describe the community college environment, community college specific terminology and motivations need to be reflected in the descriptive language. For the community college to move forward toward the fluid operating state that it desires, it was recommended that the college actively invest in reducing the structural barriers to organizational fluidity identified in this study and engage in developing a conscious strategy to improve both informal and formal communication throughout the college.

This study contributes significant benefit in that it shows promise in indicating specific variables that a community college wishing to move toward or maintain a fluid state needs to either improve or maintain. With continued exploration, ultimately the hope with this new understanding is to offer new approaches to community colleges to allow them to fluidly to mitigate potentially disrupting events, to recognize environmental opportunity, and most importantly, to meet their missions of serving students and their communities more effectively. This was the first step.

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An Examination of Organizational Fluidity and Workplace Quality in a Community
College Setting: An Internal Multi-Stakeholder Perspective

by
Catherine L. Porter

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APPROVED:

Major Professor, representing Education

Dean of the College of Education

Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Catherine L. Porter, Author

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I would like to sincerely thank all of those who have surrounded and fostered me through both my doctoral work and dissertation. At no time has this been a journey alone. My committee, family, friends, colleagues, and community have provided amazingly dedicated and strong support the whole way.

One of the things I am most proud of with this work is that it is not wholly mine. Participants offered invaluable insight, people at the case community college who were not even subjects provided warm hospitality, and the college's leadership publicly endorsed my work. With the coding process, five people other than myself were involved. Everything from the initial design to the final editing has been a wonderfully collaborative process. Although I brought all of the pieces together and form the common thread, all of these people have their voices inextricably woven throughout this dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Both private and public sector organizations, and even institutions of higher education that are steeped in convention, are finding that traditional management practices lack the workplace quality and fluidity attributes to maintain the level and quality of workflow necessary to be effective and efficient in our increasingly complex and evolving operational world (Gutsche, 2009). Current examples of influencing environmental factors from within the community college environment include: record enrollments in decreased funding environments (Kelderman, 2011), rapidly evolving changes in student demographics (Crawford & Jervis, 2011), increased emphasis on workforce training programs to bolster economic outcomes (Adams, 2011), and intense for-profit competition (Crawford & Jervis, 2011). Management of this environmental flux, frequently results in internal stakeholder behavior that encourages both connections and disconnections in supporting development of the organizational environment needed to thrive in this new world (Blanchard, Carlos, & Randolph, 2001; Florida, 2002). More than ever before, organizations are being forced not only to think about new ways to confront and manage these stakeholder behaviors, but to find fiscally prudent management strategies, structures, and practices that improve the quality and fluidity of the workplace (Carmeli & Halevi, 2009; Lowe, 2007). Adding an understanding of internal stakeholder perspectives allows novel insights into how workplace quality and organizational ambidexterity can be related to enhancing organizational goals.

Although in some ways the implementation of new management strategies and structures is exhilarating, it also creates significant challenges to all internal

organizational stakeholders. Today's organizations must continually maintain awareness of, and links to, their internal and external operating environments if they are to remain viable and competitive (Capra, 1996; Farnsworth, 2007; Wheatley, 2006). It has been concluded that traditional management strategies and structures that employ control type management practices typically become mechanistic and hierarchical, and due to potential scarcity, management personnel begin to silo resources (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Siloing refers to hoarding resources, which may be financial, human resources, physical resources, or even critical information. What is needed, is to think of new ways to involve all stakeholders, to maintain effective and efficient information flow, and to establish high degrees of communication, in order to leverage the resources necessary to weather change (Galagan, 1992; Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006; McCowan, Bowen, Huselid, & Becker, 1999; Wheatley, 2007). It is through this nurturing and full utilization of human capital that organizations can simultaneously capitalize on unique and possibly temporary opportunities and resolve constraints to implementation (Agle et al., 2008).

By investing in the creation of an organizational culture that invokes the innovative spirit of all stakeholders and develops information sharing networks, organizations have the potential to experience an exponential rate of return in the development of a fluid workforce (Florida, 2002; Wheatley & Frieze, 2011). When this level of organizational culture is achieved, the institution can not only enhance its mission, but thrive and innovate as well. Characteristic of this new way of thinking about organizations are concepts derived from human resource, business, and organizational

behavior research literature; more specifically, concepts related to high quality work environments, stakeholder involvement, and organizational fluidity or ambidexterity. This literature focuses on: empowerment of individuals, fostering relationships and collaboration, open channels of communication and information flow, clear expectations, high involvement, and recognition of human needs (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005; Lowe, 2007; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). High quality work environments encourage equally shared responsibility among all organizational stakeholders for achieving collective goals within organizations, and actively empower all stakeholders to do so (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004; Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 2004; Wheatley, 2006).

This research is a response to numerous calls to better understand what is needed to create these high quality and highly fluid work environments within organizations (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004; Laplume, Sonpay, & Litz, 2008; Lowe, 2007; Xanthopoulou, et al., 2009). It addresses this need by examining workplace quality and fluidity practices in a community college setting using an internal stakeholder perspective. By employing an internal multi-stakeholder perspective and a level of analysis centered on the community college, this research empirically examines workplace quality and fluidity practices in the wider organizational context of business operations and sets out to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What insights can be gleaned from stakeholders as to how organizational fluidity and workplace quality can be enhanced at the case community college?

RQ2: What are the relationships between perceptions of internal stakeholders on organizational fluidity and workplace quality practices in the case community college environment?

RQ3: How might organizational fluidity and high quality work environment practice variables be described to more aptly characterize their relevance in the community college setting?

The aims of the research include enhancing the understanding of the practices critical for creating high quality and fluid workplaces and of the operational value of doing so.

Theories offering solutions have proven successful in the for-profit business world, however they have as yet not been tested in the world of higher education. Given that community colleges are currently facing extreme environmental changes and are actively looking for ways to effectively address very complex issues, this research sought to explore if these solutions also apply in the community college environment. If applicable, this research holds the promise of providing improved management strategies and practices for community colleges to better confront and manage the complex issues that they face. By enhancing the internal human resources capacity within the community college, it is possible that not only predictable change but also unforeseen shifts in the operational environment may be mitigated as well.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this research was to build upon existing organizational fluidity and high quality work environment theory in order to lend understanding toward its application in the community college environment. This enhanced understanding brings with it the promise of going beyond knowledge of its application in the for profit business world, and therefore presents the ability to begin development of new tools for community college leaders to build the institutional capacity they desperately need to successfully mitigate potentially disruptive change to their operating environments.

As our organizations struggle to handle the rapidly shifting operating environment paradigm described in Chapter 1, they likewise struggle with how to adapt their management strategies, structures, and practices to confront this challenge.

Unfortunately, the traditional mechanistic management practices upon which many of our current organizational systems were built, do not lend themselves well to the working environments of today (Wheatley, 2006). As production and information technology have developed, low skilled jobs have become increasingly more automated, which means that workers need to operate at mid to high skill levels (Blakely & Bradshaw, 2002; Hoggs, 1999). This coupled with high degrees of change within operating environments, requires “adaptive capacity rather than specialized routines, and horizontal collaboration rather than vertical chains of command (Kellogg, et al., 2006, p. 22)”

Employees must be educated in how to creatively problem solve and interpret their surroundings (Schreyogg & Sydow, 2010). As a result, the workforce is changing from one that must focus not only on their immediate responsibilities, but has the training,

autonomy, and ability to contribute to organizational fluidity (Blanchard, et al., 2001).

Florida (2002) writes:

(Employees) engage in creative problem solving, drawing on complex bodies of knowledge to solve specific problems. Doing so typically requires a high degree of (training) and thus a high level of human capital . . . They apply or combine standard approaches in unique ways to fit the situation, exercise a great deal of judgment, (and) perhaps try something radically new from time to time (p. 69).

These employees are valuable assets. As such, they represent a vital component of healthy institutional operations, if and only if they are tapped as a resource.

Increasingly leaders are realizing that by more fully utilizing the capacity of their human resources, they can equip their organizations to better adapt to environmental change and therefore to more effectively serve their missions (Kanter, 2003). Interest has also increased in the concept of high quality work environments, which espouses the need to: foster relationships and collaboration, empower individuals, encourage high employee involvement and creativity, and recognize human needs (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005; Lowe, 2007; Xanthopoulou, et al., 2009). We now know that beyond production and task efficiency, we must also take into consideration our human resource capacity, which includes the well-being of the people that make up this resource (Agle, et al., 2008). Likewise, in addition to increasing this capacity, stakeholder theorists argue that we also must also intentionally and actively engage employees in the

operations of our institutions (Laplume, et al., 2008). This study seeks to deepen our understanding of the joint relationships between organizational fluidity traits, stakeholder saliency values, and high quality work environment qualities within the community college context.

The linkage to fluidity is especially important, because prior research indicates that each variable (high quality work environments, organizational fluidity, and stakeholder involvement) influences organizational performance. When looked at in a holistic way, each variable represents a different facet of an interrelated whole including: core values (stakeholder involvement), organizational and social context (high quality work environment), and the ability to cultivate adaptive and sustainable organizations (fluidity).

It is important to note that existing research conducted on high quality work environments, stakeholder theory, and fluidity has been conducted in the for-profit business world. Because these theories have proven successful there, this study looks at its applicability to the community college world. If this theory does indeed apply, it brings with it the hope of providing new tools for community college leaders to utilize in effectively working with change in their operating environments.

The following literature review will describe the importance of each concept, their interconnection, and their significance in this study. It is organized in four sections. Section 2.1 reviews literature regarding organizational performance outcomes related to fluidity, Section 2.2, stakeholder theory, Section

2.3, high quality work environments, and Section 2.4, the community college context. All of which form the basis of this study.

2.1 Organizational Fluidity & Ambidexterity

The concept of organizational fluidity refers to an organizations ability to move symbiotically with its environment (Carmeli & Halevi, 2009; Schreyogg & Sydow, 2010). Symbiosis may mean mitigating potentially disrupting changes, but also means recognizing and enhancing potential opportunity. Fluidity allows an organization the initial awareness that something is happening, the room for employees to creatively adapt, and the means to integrate any changes into the larger institutional structure (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2007). An example from the community college environment would be recognizing that private industry partners are shifting their production technologies (awareness), and thus there is an urgent need to adapt workforce training programs to move away from soon to be antiquated skills to ones that will shortly be in demand (adaptation). Programs and infrastructure would then have to be manipulated to accommodate this change to ultimately serve students and their employers (integrative structure).

Work on organizational fluidity has been grounded, increasingly over the past twenty years, in living systems theory (Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 2006), management theory (Senge, 2006), organizational theory (Bolman & Deal, 1984), and human resources theory (Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001). Although the terminology varies across fields, the primary concepts remain the same; (a) it is imperative to keep information channels open, (b) it is a tricky balancing act for managers to simultaneously

balance managing existing initiatives while still allowing the freedom to move toward the future, and (c) that stakeholder involvement, particularly with regard to employees, is vital for success (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2007; Schreyogg & Sydow, 2010). Theorists also believe that the ability for fluidity is influenced by the values of the organization, the environment or context under which employees operate, and the leeway for experimentation. This being said, very little work in regard to fluidity has been conducted in a higher education setting and none in the community college environment. Given that these management principles have been accepted across the board as applying to all organizations, it would follow that these same principles apply to the community college. This study tested this assumption.

Of particular interest within the realm of organizational fluidity is a line of thought called organizational and conceptual ambidexterity. Organizational ambidexterity is commonly described as the successful balance between adaptability and alignment (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2007). Organizational ambidexterity expands the concept of organizational fluidity in that it concentrates on building capacity at the subunit level to focus on efficiency and innovation. Conceptual ambidexterity moves even further, and assigns this responsibility to all individuals within an institution (Schreyogg & Sydow, 2010). Cegarra-Navarro and Dewhurst (2007) refer to ambidexterity as a form of organizational learning in which the aspects of “(a) exploration (i.e. creating new knowledge, skills and processes), and (b) exploitation (i.e. using existing knowledge, skills, and processes)” (p. 1720) are present.

In conceptual ambidexterity tests of for-profit businesses, Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) found that there was a very strong correlation between organizational context and ambidexterity. Organizational context was characterized by a combination of performance management and social support. Performance management included administration setting challenging goals, allowing leeway to creatively solve problems, use of business goals and performance measures, accountability for performance, and reward through compensation. Social support encompassed administrative: engagement in staff development, delegation, access to information, quick replication of best practices across the organization, and treatment of failure as a learning opportunity, as well as willingness and ability to take prudent risks. Ambidexterity in a global sense refers to the ability for “individual employees to make choices between alignment-oriented and adaptation-oriented activities in the context of their day-to-day work” (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004, p. 49). Birkinshaw and Gibson’s (2004) study revealed that ambidexterity and not organizational context directly influenced performance. However, organizational context did assist performance in the longer term because it created an environment supportive of ambidexterity, thereby having an indirect, yet contributive link.

Because the scale used in the Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) study was tested to assess the quality of environments supportive of fluid operating precepts, the present study design capitalized on this prior work. (See Appendix A.) By using the same instrument, this new study contributes to further understanding these relationships within the community college sector, and tests the assumption made in Birkinshaw and Gibson’s (2004) paper, that “many government agencies, universities, and state-owned companies

fall naturally into (what they call the country-club context)” in which “there is a strong sense of support and trust, but no one works too hard and mediocre performance is tolerated” (p. 52). This context assumes high social support and low performance management. This potential bias being stated, the study is recognized in the field as valuable, and dovetails with the concepts of stakeholder theory and high quality work environments. In this study, higher education institutions, and community colleges in particular, were not studied, and remained prime areas for exploration.

2.2 Stakeholder Theory

Closely aligned, stakeholder theory posits that active and mindful participation by all members of a group are critical to organizational success (Laplume, et al., 2008; Senge, 2006; Wheatley, 2006). Theorists contend that for an organization to be flexible, resilient and form a synergy with the world outside of it, everyone from the president, to the entry level employee must frequently interact with others inside and outside of the organization. It is this continual interaction that leads to sustainable survival and organizational success (Senge, 1996; Wheatley & Frieze, 2011). This outlook again is in vast contrast to the more traditional mechanistic management styles where organizations are more hierarchical and information is only shared with those who are determined by management to need to know. What is gained through high levels of informed employee involvement is a collaborative ecosystem that maintains connected information super highways, and fully utilizes human resource capacity (Alexander, 2011). This ecosystem is highly complex, but it is this very complexity that can also handle the nuanced and involved issues that organizations deal with (Alexander, 2011).

Stakeholder theory literature does not offer implementation solutions for stakeholder involvement, which is one of its criticisms (Dunham, Freeman, & Liedtka, 2006; Laplume, et al., 2008). What it does instead, is to ground management values in the ethics of good management. It places decision makers in a position in which they have an ethical responsibility to consider their actions in terms of their effect on all stakeholders (Agle, et al., 2008; Alexander, 2011). This has been referred to as the “shareholder versus stakeholder” or the “Freidman versus Freeman” debate. This argument took place in the early conception of the theory and originated from those who felt that business and ethics should be separate. It has since waned and is now part of standard business curriculums. Theorists emphasize the importance of treating stakeholders, including employees, as human beings with names, faces, and families (McVea, 2005). The importance of this value is that because decision makers determine allocation of resources, and who has contributive capacity, how stakeholders/employees are viewed directly affects their institutional ability to participate (Agle, Mitchell, & Sonnenfeld, 1999).

In looking at the components that lead a decision maker to show preference for one stakeholder over another, three contributing factors have been identified; power, legitimacy, and urgency (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Power is the ability for one person to influence another to act in a way that she or he would not otherwise do (Agle, et al., 1999; Mitchell, et al., 1997). According to Etzioni, there are varying types of power including coercive power (i.e. force, violence, restraint), utilitarian power (material and financial resources), and normative power (symbolic resources) (Mitchell,

et al., 1997). Legitimacy, which represents socially accepted structures and behaviors, works hand in hand with power to create a higher degree of relevance or saliency to decision makers (Mitchell, et al., 1997). Urgency is the catalytic degree of immediate relevance. (Agle, et al., 1999; Mitchell, et al., 1997). The level of power, legitimacy, and urgency a decision maker assigns to any one stakeholder may change over time, may be selective, and are subjective. The degree to which managers hold classes or individuals in priority categories within these components is referred to as stakeholder saliency (Mitchell, et al., 1997) Again, where one ranks on this saliency scale affects the amount of resources and involvement that a particular stakeholder may have in the operation of an organization.

Another debate within the stakeholder theory realm centered around who constitutes a stakeholder. Freeman's definition of stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect, or is affected, by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Agle, et al., 1999). For the purposes of this study, the focus centered solely on internal stakeholders, and employees specifically. It is this piece that dovetails with both high quality work environment theory, which espouses the importance of employee involvement, and, similarly, organizational fluidity.

As described in Section 1, stakeholder involvement is crucial for organizational fluidity. For institutions, including individual community colleges, to remain vital, it would logically follow that investment in development of management systems that take individual employee contribution into consideration is a necessary step. If value in the stakeholder involvement is recognized by organizational decision makers, it also follows

that there is a high probability that they are likewise fulfilling the criteria for both high fluidity and high quality work environments as well, because it forms an overarching value.

2.3 High Quality Work Environments

Conceptually the research relating to the intersection between organizational fluidity and stakeholder theory is found in that of high quality work environment theory. As mentioned in the Fluidity Section, in order for an organization to create an ambidextrous or fluid environment, which is a performance outcome, the managerial supports of social and performance related structures must be present. The details of these support structures are found, and quantified within high quality work environment research.

There are several different ways to define high quality work environments. Lowe (2007) bases his model on four concepts: work environment, intrinsic job characteristics, work satisfaction, and work performance. This study showed that employees who have positive perceptions of their work places and experiences were more satisfied with their jobs and thus were more productive because they had the opportunity to use their skills and expertise. Key to this perception was the employees' ability to work independently and to be involved in decision making. Indicators were: the ability to advance, supported access to training opportunity, schedule flexibility, work/life balance, benefits, decision making freedom, respect, employee recognition, relationships with peers, job challenge, and feelings of accomplishment.

These indicators are consistent across other studies as well. Barling, Kelloway, and Iverson (2003) define high quality work environment characteristics including fostering employee empowerment, training, autonomy, creativity, and involvement as being pivotal for encouraging the employee centered model necessary for organizations' human resources to be optimally effective. Work regarding the relationships between job resources, personal resources, and work engagement by Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli (2009), define job resources or workplace quality as the

physical, social, psychological, and/or organizational aspects of the job that are (a) functional in achieving work goals, (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, and (c) stimulate personal growth and development (p. 236).

Again, very similar in definition to the other studies, they related their exploration to autonomy, social support, supervisory coaching, performance feedback, and opportunities for professional development.

This study replicated this prior work, albeit in the community college rather than business, nursing, and production settings. Due to agreement across the field, and the existence of a pre-existing scale, the interview questions used in the 2007 Lowe study mentioned above, have been integrated into the high quality work environment evaluation portion of this study. (See Appendix B.) This study is significant in that although existing work has compared the relationship

of high quality work environments to (a) business related outcomes, (b) to the individual performance of workers, and (c) to relationships between decision makers and subordinates, the relationship between high quality workplaces and stakeholder involvement in organizational performance outcomes of institutional fluidity and creativity remained to be explored. This work begins this journey.

2.4 Summary

By taking a holistic view of components necessary to create highly responsive, sustainable, and fluid organizations, one quickly realizes that the key is full development and use of human resources capacity. The system that encourages this capacity encompasses organizational values, its supporting structures, and its employee environment. Interlinking theory that defines each are found in organizational fluidity, stakeholder, and high quality work environment research. Although these studies form a rich understanding of the components that must be present for a healthy system, they do so within a for-profit business setting. Because these operational strategies have proven to be highly successful at fortifying for-profit businesses' ability to recognize, adapt with, and structurally support the resulting changes, it follows that this research into the applicability within the community college setting could provide the deeper theoretical understanding to develop the underpinning of tools to successfully mitigate environmental change within the higher education environment as well. Since this change is rapid, and inevitable, this work is vital. By using existing scales and theory, this study sought to go beyond existing theory by applying it in the community college

environment, utilizing multiple symbiotic theories, and using internal multi-stake holder semi-structured interviews to deepen understanding.

Chapter 3: Materials & Methods

Exploratory in nature, this study's goal was to examine high quality work environments and organizational fluidity in an expanded organizational context, and specifically within a community college environment. There is evidence that shows that high quality work environments with fluid organizational arrangements are fundamental indicators of effective and sustainable operational states (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004). However, very little is empirically known about the relationship between stakeholder perceptions of high quality work environments and organizational fluidity in the same study and setting. Thus the patterns that are linked or disconnected between the different stakeholders are unclear. This research specifically addresses this gap.

Building on prior research, the methodology for this study was strengthened by building upon prior studies to lend validity and reliability. The study design drew from existing research studies (Pagell, Wasserman, & Wu, 2010; Wu & Pagell, 2011), on recognized best practices for case study methods by experienced authors (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012), and utilized Likert scales employed in prior high quality work environment and organizational fluidity studies (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004; Lowe, 2007). Realizing that there are recognized limitations to each of these methods and methodologies (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Creswell, 2008; Denzin, 2011; Gummesson, 1991), care was taken to address concerns, and where possible, to strengthen the findings. The end result became a highly collaborative work, capitalizing on expertise and viewpoints of multi-stakeholders beyond that solely of the researcher.

As a single case study, the breadth of exploration focused on one institution, lending itself to concentrated and rich learning regarding multiple embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2009). These embedded units consisted of the key concepts being tested: organizational fluidity and high quality work environments. Three stakeholder groups were interviewed, using a semi-structured interview design, which were initiated by administering the existing Likert scales discussed above followed by qualifying statements by the subjects. Stakeholder groups included: high level administration (the president), full time staff (exempt and non-exempt), and faculty (full time).

The following explains the procedures employed throughout the study, specifically the methodological theory in which the study was grounded, the study design, and how steps were taken to mitigate any potential limitations to each of these choices.

3.1 Methodological Framework

Denzin describes evidenced based exploration, such as experimental research, as being “scientific, empirical, and linked to theory; it uses methods for direct investigation and produces coherent chains of causal reasoning based on experimental or quasi-experimental findings, offering generalizations that can be replicated and used to test and refine theory” (Denzin, 2011, p. 647). Within a group of people or an organization, this type of study capitalizes on both the knowledge of the people within the organization and its context to more fully understand phenomena (Abama & Widdershoven, 2011).

With the goal of refining existing theory, and exploring its applicability to the community college, the study design facilitated use of existing variables characterizing

high quality workplace environments and organizational fluidity to more deeply explore not only whether the variables were present, but potential connections and disconnects that are perceived internally by stakeholders. Coupling semi-structured interviews with existing Likert scales, internal stakeholders provided qualitative data, that offered a more robust and holistic perspective than administering the established Likert scales alone (Fowler, 2002).

Drawbacks of employing an experimental mixed method approach are what Denzin (2011) refers to as insufficient warrentability, transparency, and/or trust. Warrentability refers to having sufficient internal validity to be credible and enough evidence to justify conclusions. Transparency regards having sufficient discussion of the study design and logic. Trust is the insurance of valid data. Steps can be made to circumvent these potential pitfalls, by fully elucidating processes, using triangulation through documentation, using multiple coders to analyze data, highlighting evidence, offering alternative interpretations, and providing context (Denzin, 2011). To mitigate these concerns, all of these solutions have been employed in conducting, establishing, and communicating the findings of this case study.

As case study, this study falls within the qualitative methods realm. Thus it is necessary to take into consideration concerns specific to qualitative methods. Critics of qualitative methods specify potential limitations as including: a more difficult acceptance of study rigor in the academic world, potential influencing of the results through researcher bias, familiar relationships developing between subjects influencing subject response, value laden findings, and the inability to generalize findings to broader

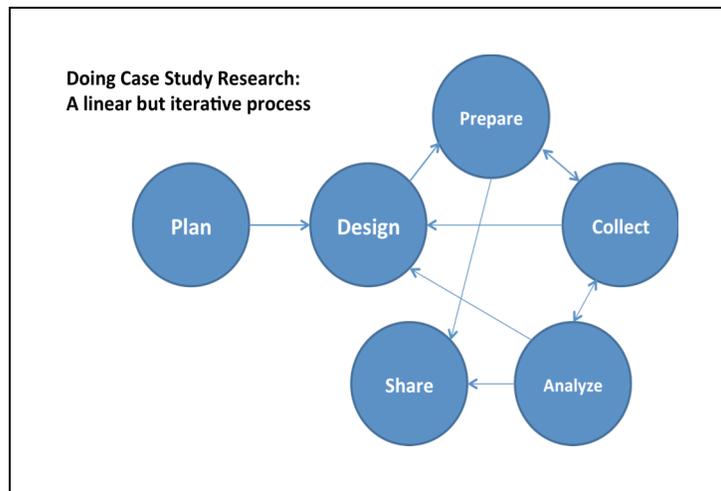
populations (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Creswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Gummesson, 1991). However, Gummesson (1991) and Merriam (2009) argue that these very characteristics are indeed the strengths of qualitative methods, because they contribute to a more complete snapshot of an environment, or context, than would be possible in quantitative studies. This type of study seeks to tell people's stories, or truths, from their view of reality, in order to more fully understand the meanings they express. Because of the degree of contextual understanding developed through case study methods, findings are often used to improve practice, inform future research, and at times drive new thinking (Merriam, 2009). Bias may exist in the findings, however the same measures that were taken to address concerns with an experimental mixed method design likewise address the qualitative research concerns of value laden findings and limited ability to generalize findings.

Grounded in case study methodology, the design was informed throughout the research process by discoveries that happened throughout its continuum, allowing for flexibility, natural emergence of themes, questioning, and understanding (Creswell, 2008). Case study by definition is bounded in that its exploration takes place in a particular place and time (Merriam, 2009), and in this case, with a specific assembly of people that was only going to be present there and then. The definition of these bounds forms the unit of analysis (Merriam, 2009). By engaging in this very rich method of discovery, patterns and contingencies, and the uniqueness and commonalities of the groups within the cases were encouraged to surface (Stake, 1995; Woodside, 2010). Albeit a complex method, case study's unique value is in the detail gleaned from multiple

perspectives. The combination of both a birds-eye and close-up view seeks to elucidate the how's and why's of a phenomenon, which is especially useful when applying existing theoretical constructs (Yin, 2009).

Case study as an iterative process is well depicted in Yin's (2009) case study research model. See Figure 3.1. When coupled with data collection processes that allow for triangulation, the depth of understanding created by this organic

Figure 3.1.



Sourced from "Case Study Research: Design & Methods" by Robert Yin. Copyright 2008 by Sage

process is further enhanced (Woodside, 2010; Yin, 2009). In triangulation, multiple sources of data are utilized to clarify and verify evidence and findings. Sources include: direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and review of written documentation (Woodside, 2010); all of which were employed in this study. Although originally used in quantitative studies, triangulation is now also regularly applied to qualitative studies to heighten the strength of findings (Yin, 2012).

Case study may be multi-case or single case. This study focused on a single case. The benefit to this according to Salant and Dillman (1994) is to more completely understand the variables related to the research questions. By filling in gaps of

understanding, the complexity of phenomena emerges allowing for more ideas and questions to form. Salant and Dillman (1994) also point out how valuable these studies are in informing the framework of future studies, because new areas of exploration that form the context of the phenomena are now known. This being said, they assert that findings may not be generalized to the broad population. Stake (1995) agrees, but suggests that this newly refined understanding can be applied as a petite generalization. These are generalizations that occur throughout the case rather than to the population as a whole. When describing findings, he recommends describing factors that make the case unique, and what alternative selections could be.

Throughout the study design, three the following questions were considered:

- What methods and methodologies will most effectively answer the research questions?
- What benefits and drawbacks does each of them have?
- Are there ways to build in safeguards to mitigate any potential concerns, or is the value of that choice greater than the limitations?

The end result yielded work strengthened by the collaborative nature of the study. This is especially salient with the study design, coding, and interpretation of findings. Since this study is exploratory, qualitative, a single case study, involved semi-structured interviews, and was administered by the researcher who designed the study, there is a high propensity for findings to be laden with bias. Controlling for this meant incorporating triangulation of data, utilizing existing studies, and drawing on the knowledge offered by

experts other than solely that of the researcher. By doing so, the final product is much stronger than it would have been otherwise.

Building upon the general constructs just discussed, the following sections will provide specific details regarding the methodological path taken while conducting the study.

3.2 Study Participants

In confirmatory research, random sampling is generally suggested (Cook & Campbell, 1979). However, purposeful non-random samples that are based on specific theoretical underpinnings are suggested for qualitative research (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Singleton & Straits, 2004); hence particularistic methods were employed (Merriam, 2009). Per Honigmann (1982), these methods are most appropriate when “solving qualitative problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences” (p. 84). We know that both high quality work environments and highly fluid organizations are able to more successfully navigate high flux environments, and we know the variables that contribute to attaining these states. What we do not know are the implications of implementation in the community college setting, and the connections and disconnections that can occur between stakeholder groups. Thus the participant community college is one engaged in implementation of human resource practices targeted to increase the variables which indicate high quality work environments and organizational fluidity.

Stake (1995) also pointed out that study cases must be selectively orchestrated. From a pragmatic standpoint, vital criteria to the success of the study are: the feasibility

of physically being able to access subjects, finding a location with people amenable to working with the researcher, and where subjects have the knowledge or characteristics the researcher is looking for. The community college selected is located in the Pacific Northwest, which allowed the researcher convenient access to participants, and a cursory prior familiarity with both the institution and leadership within it. This connection allowed for endorsement at the leadership level, and willing cooperation within key access points of the college.

The participant college is a medium sized community college, with a student enrollment of between 20,000 and 30,000 students in the 2011-2012 academic year, a classified staff of between 400 and 500, a faculty of between 400 and 500, and professional faculty between 40 and 50. (Source: Site college website Fast Facts document.) High level administration consists of the president and several vice presidents. While there are both larger and smaller institutions in this region, this size was chosen intentionally. In a smaller school, there can be very little role difference between the leadership and the faculty and staff. In a larger school, there are many layers of leadership ranging from that of the main campus to what can be sizeable branch campuses with very distinct leadership styles. This particular college has several layers of management between the president and those working directly with students, the public, and constituents. There is a clear role distinction between the president and those delivering services. However, the college is small enough that, although there are branch centers, they are not sizeable enough to have their own managerial influence sufficient to remove the connection employees have to the main campuses' leadership.

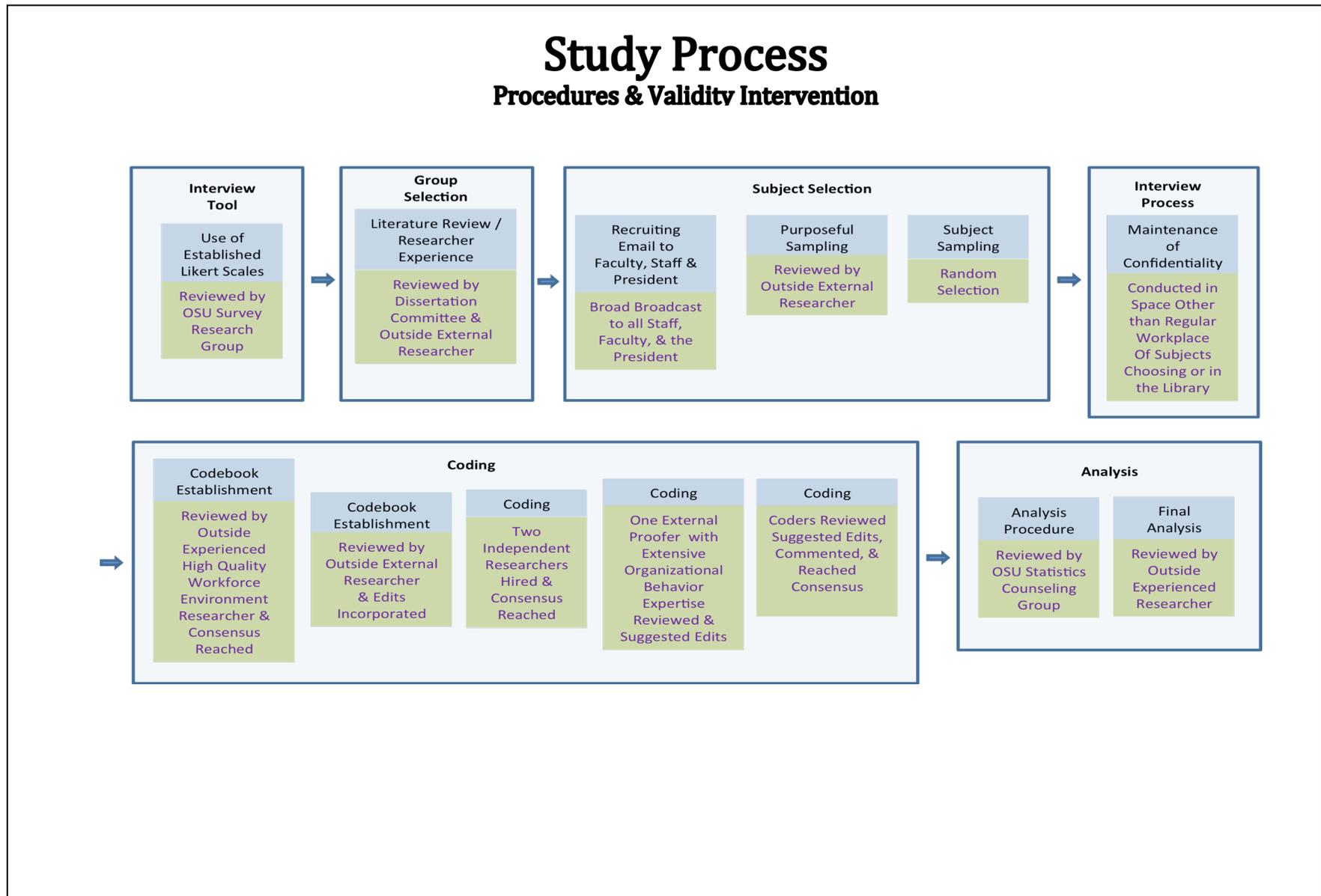
For the purposes of the study, participants were targeted in three groups: high level administration, faculty, and staff. Inclusion of each participant group was motivated by stakeholder literature. High level administrators are ultimately responsible for the outcomes central for the creation, adoption, and sustained investment in high quality work environment practices. Likewise, they are accountable for high quality workplace quality and organizational fluidity outcomes critical for this study. Staff and faculty are included because they experience the management interventions being studied, and can provide evidence that these practices are indeed being implemented, the degree of implementation, and offer their perceptions of the interventions' effectiveness at achieving the intended goals of the administrative group. Staff and faculty are grouped separately, because their roles, and therefore perceptions may vary. A total of 11 participants were interviewed. Five were staff, five were faculty, and one was the president.

To participate, staff and faculty were required to have worked at the college for a minimum of three years and to be full time employees. This allowed for respondents to have been at the institution long enough to have acclimated to it, participated in it, and to have had the time necessary in the environment to have participated in initiatives if they so wished and their supervisors so allowed. The feedback gleaned from the interviews had the level of knowledge necessary to give an informed sampling. As mentioned, having sufficient expertise or knowledge to inform the study is crucial to its success (Stake 1995). To maintain their anonymity, the duration of employment was categorized as either: 0 to 5 years, 6 to 10, or 11+.

3.3 Data Collection

As mentioned in the methodological framework section, great care was taken to mitigate potential limitations of the methods and methodologies used. Figure 3.2 illustrates the procedures built into each step of the study. Beginning with development of the interview protocol, existing studies were used which tested the validity and reliability of the Likert scale statements used. Group selection was made based on the literature review and researcher experience. These choices were further confirmed by both the dissertation committee and an experienced outside external researcher engaged in higher education and studying high quality work environments.

To recruit subjects, a broadcast email was sent to faculty and staff by the Director of Human Resources and the Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. Volunteers were then assigned to either the faculty or staff pool, and random samples of five participants for each group were selected. In the case of non-response to schedule an interview, random sampling was once again generated until the pool was filled. As the sample was purposeful, middle managers and anyone working in the president's office were excluded. This was due to the nature of their roles and proximity to the high level administration creating a higher probability of being included in conversations in which faculty and staff were excluded and thus affect the sampling. For the purposes of this study, middle management ranged from a Dean up to a vice president in the institutional hierarchy. Other volunteers who were withdrawn from the study either personally knew the researcher or did not meet the participation criteria of being full time or having worked at the institution for three years or longer. Conversely, one subject was



purposefully selected due to a split role as department chair and faculty with the majority of their FTE being devoted to teaching. From this subject's vantage point, they offered a potentially holistic perspective of the department, but may or may not have been involved in the conversations that deans and vice presidents would have been.

The resulting pools ranged throughout the functional areas of the college and included one staff member from a branch campus. Faculty disciplines ranged from workforce development orientations to teaching courses primarily attended by students intending to transition from a two year to a four year degree program to complete a bachelor's degree. Staff responsibilities ranged from student services to individuals supporting the college infrastructure. Although the sample was random, the final sample pool represented programs and functions across the institution.

Data was collected by conducting semi structured interviews with overlapping questions between the stakeholders to allow for triangulation (Merriam, 2009) between the three target groups: high level administrators, staff, and faculty. To maintain confidentiality, subjects were given pseudonyms, and interviews were conducted in spaces other than the participants' work area. If they so chose, interviews were conducted off campus entirely. These interviews were recorded, and later transcribed. In adhering to best practices, the interview protocol was revised after each interview (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Yin, 2009).

Although surveys would have been much more expedient, this exploratory study sought to gain a deeper level of understanding regarding subject perceptions that could not be garnered from the survey method alone, hence the semi-structured interview

format. The structured portion consisted of Likert-scaled statements taken directly from work done on high quality work environments by Lowe (2007) and organizational ambidexterity by Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004). After each statement was ranked, the subject was then asked to elaborate on why they assigned that rank. Follow-up questions were asked to lend more complete understanding and clarification as suggested by Merriam (2009). While the interviews were being conducted, the researcher made notes regarding environmental, managerial, and organizational observations, and collected any relevant documents offered by the interviewees. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Multiple sources of evidence were collected, such as documentation, interviews, direct observations, and participation-observations as suggested by Yin (2009) allowing for further data triangulation. Additionally, to corroborate the emergent findings, the evidence was compared between multiple stakeholders, through the lenses of multiple theories, and with multiple analysis methods (Patton, 2002).

3.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

Coding and model building took place after the data were collected in order to control for confirmation bias influencing results (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The underlying factors influencing development of the code book focused on high quality work environment variables and aligned with institutional ambidexterity performance outcome concepts. See Appendix C. These factors are also the bases of the interview

questions. Coding identified the following constructs:

1. Degree of perceived organizational fluidity (static, active, or fluid states)
2. Degree of perceived high quality work environment practice including internal stakeholder involvement (static, active, or fluid states)

Since both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, two paths of analysis were taken.

Regarding the quantitative path, the Likert scale response portion of the data was coded in two ways. First, rankings that participants assigned to the institution as a whole were summarized and analyzed. Of interest were emerging response patterns from both within the target group and between target groups. Analysis included review of the means, medians, modes, and ranges of the data. Rankings that were given by participants specifically for the employee's immediate area were used as part of the qualitative portion of the analysis. This was due to the fact that, as the interview process was conducted, subjects often strongly preferred the option to differentiate between their area and that of the college as a whole. This was not part of the protocol, and therefore separate rankings were not consistently requested across the sample. For those who found this important, it was a critical distinction that warranted consideration. The final data set was sorted into a faculty and a staff grouping. Each of those groups was then sorted by duration of service at the institution followed by gender.

The qualitative data portion of the interviews was coded with variables directly related to the characteristics Lowe (2007) and Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) identified

as key variables needed to be present for high quality work environments and organizational fluidity. Again, the scales utilized in conducting the study were taken from these studies, and contained already recognized high quality work environment and organizational ambidexterity characterizing variables.

Prior to coding, a codebook was developed by the researcher. To rate the degree to which variables were fully assessed, indicators extracted from existing literature were utilized to establish coding criteria for three status levels: static, active, and fluid, to determine the level of workplace quality and organizational fluidity stakeholders perceived the institution had achieved. Once constructed, the codebook was reviewed to reduce researcher bias affecting the findings. The first review of the indicator criteria was conducted by an experienced high quality work environment researcher familiar with the project. Following review, consensus was reached regarding indicator language. The resulting code book was then sent to an outside reviewer unfamiliar with the study. Suggestions were reviewed and incorporated. This process is depicted in Figure 3.2.

Two coders unfamiliar with the study were then hired for the initial coding stage. After the completion of coding, the researcher and coders met to discuss any discrepancies between the two data sets until consensus was reached. The end result was then forwarded to a proofer, who has over 25 years of organizational behavior consulting experience, to offer any suggestions for changes. Upon receipt, the proposed suggestions were sent to the original coders to review. Consensus was reached and the final data set subsequently established.

The findings from each interview were compared to the others for emerging patterns. Of particular interest was the comparison between the perception of stakeholders and those of decision makers, and any linkages or disconnects that may be hindering or assisting in development of the desired operating states.

Results were analyzed using triangulation methods, pattern matching hypothesis building, and examining contradictory results (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009). Comparisons were made across stakeholder groups, indicators, data types, and particularistic groups.

Chapter 4: Results

To discuss the study results, this chapter will first define the context of the study by describing the case institution and participants, followed by presentation of the data leading to essential findings. These findings, although tied to the research questions listed below, are inextricably intertwined throughout each of the findings. The research questions are:

RQ1: What effects do the relationships between perceptions of internal stakeholders have on organizational fluidity and workplace quality practices?

RQ2: What new and novel insights can be gleaned from stakeholders as to how organizational fluidity and workplace quality can be enhanced?

RQ3: How might organizational fluidity and high quality work environment practice variables be modified to describe their relevance in the community college setting?

This chapter will focus on elucidating the patterns leading to the findings and display the evidence, but will not discuss them in terms of the research questions. They will instead be noted and interlaced through the discussion in Chapter 5.

As described earlier, data were triangulated from semi-structured interviews, researcher observation, the subject institution's website, and from documents provided by the institution. Of prime importance is protection of both the identity of the participating community college and the identities of the subject participants. To this end, any

materials that would reveal the location of the college or who participated will be intentionally referred to by their data type or general descriptive characteristics rather than directly sourced.

4.1 Case Institution Context

This case institution, like many other community colleges (Cohen & Kisker, 2010), was established in the mid to late 1960's. It is governed by a seven member elected board, is located in the Pacific Northwest, and serves between 20,000 and 30,000 students in a two county area (institution website). Both counties contain both rural and urban areas. To ensure service delivery throughout them, the college utilizes branch campuses that they refer to as centers. Educational programming includes: general education courses, professional technical training, lower-division college transfer courses, continuing education classes, and distance education. The curriculum is delivered both in traditional classroom settings and online as part of their e-campus program.

This community college had recently undergone major shifts in funding, in capacity demand, and in the regulatory environment (institution website and interviews). Revenue is drawn from county property taxes, tuition and fees, state government allocation, federal grants and allocation, and charitable giving. Until 2010, the majority of operating revenue came from the state and federal sources. After 2010, this shifted and the preponderance of revenue began to be derived from tuition and fees. A significant economic downturn facilitated major cuts in both service provision and in staffing. At the time, they had made all of the cuts they feasibly could while still

providing the same services, but found themselves in a position of needing to rethink how they orchestrate services, what services they deliver, and the degree of outreach.

From within the community college, this represented a marked shift in their culture and a very real threat to core student centered values regarding open access (interviews). This was also at a time when student demand and community need had exponentially risen. New funding and regulatory requirements influenced mission focus on success measures revolving around degree and certificate completion along with student achievement of learning outcomes rather than enrollment.

In addition to the major shifts in the operating environment, the college simultaneously experienced major changes in leadership. This began in early in the 2000's with a change in presidency coupled with the first of a series of major budget cuts (institution website). At that time, the out-going president who had been there for close to 15 years, proved a hard act to follow. Characterized by many interviewees as having a very paternalistic governing style, he regularly walked around the entirety of the campus, learned everyone's name, asked people their opinions, and it was said that he may ultimately make his own decisions, but at least he respected people enough to ask their viewpoints. Interviewees had also described this time as being resource rich. Although property tax legislation was passed decreasing state revenues, the college expanded workforce training partnerships and established a foundation to facilitate charitable giving, which effectively smoothed out the larger effects of the reduced state support. The new president was female, faced the beginning of the paradigm shift described earlier, and ultimately was not viewed as favorably by the staff and faculty. During her

close to ten year tenure, the college was restructured, the student body increased approximately 40%, and more severe state revenue reductions were experienced.

This was the beginning of needing to rethink how business was being done at a basic structural level, but it was still possible to continue in a status quo fashion. Surviving environmental change was seen as just a matter of weathering the storm by holding on as long as they could. As time progressed, funding could no longer support programs and services as it once had. She retired and the current president came on board. His tenure at the time of this study had been less than five years. He was facing an environment similar to that of his predecessor in terms of resources, but the difference was that he was following a period of reduced resources and an outgoing president who was out of favor rather than a period of ample resources with a president who was in favor.

The current president realized that maintaining status quo was not an option. To this end, he was actively engaged in developing the organizational culture to rethink itself. He characterizes the process as not only thinking outside of the box, but breaking the box and making a new one that works to better achieve their goals. This transition represents a desired shift from a mechanistic top down operating style to the more fluid environment that this study explored. To orchestrate the process, the president very strongly grounded his intervention in change management literature, his prior presidential experience, and intentional conversations he initiated both from within the senior management team composed of vice presidents and himself, and a group he co-founded on campus called the Open Minds Group (*pseudonym*). Occurring monthly, the forums

were open to faculty, staff, and students and all were encouraged to attend through regular communications coming from his office.

The active effort engaged in to achieve what is characterized by high fluidity organizations, along with their support of this research, facilitated the choice to use this institution as the case community college for this study. One study limitation was that internal stakeholder perceptions were captured at one point in time at the end of an academic year. Change processes by their very nature change over time. This study can only indicate where this particular institution was in May and June of 2012. If all goes well, it is possible that if the president's interventions are successful, perceptions of many of the fluidity indicators will be ranked higher in the future. Conversely, it is also possible that the process will not work, and the indicators could be ranked lower. Future research could show longitudinally, what worked and what did not. This study is only forming the basis for such exploration, providing a snapshot in time, and testing the theory in the community college setting.

4.2 Participant Descriptions

Although the interview participants were randomly sampled from the volunteer pool, subjects represented areas from across the college. The original volunteer pool consisted of nine faculty members, 17 staff members, and the president. After the list was culled of individuals not meeting the participation criteria of working at the college for three years and being full time, anyone who was middle management (deans or program directors) or who had an existing relationship with the researcher, the pool was left 11 staff and eight faculty. The remaining group was randomly selected by using an

Excel random number generator until five staff and four faculty members were chosen. The fifth faculty member was purposefully chosen due to his role as a departmental chair. His FTE was split between teaching and administrative responsibilities, with the preponderance of his FTE dedicated to teaching. This individual offered the insight of someone who may or may not be involved in conversations with high level administration, but who could also have a vantage point to see organizational fluidity and workplace quality connections and disconnections in a more holistic way.

Overall, the duration of service across this community college was very high. Between the 2007-08 and 2012-13 academic years, the faculty and staff turnover rates have remained at or below 10%. (Source: Case institution website) This was likewise reflected in the study sample. Of the faculty, all four males had worked there for 11+ years. The one female had been there for between six and ten years. With the staff population, four had worked for the college 11+ years, three of whom were female and one male, and one male participant had been there between three and five years. In contrast to these long durations of service, the president at the time of the interview had been at the college for less than five years. This is important to note when looking at the findings, because this study focuses on how well the culture the president intends is filtering through to the front line staff and faculty. Chiaburu and Marinova (2012) suggest that non-supervisory employees tend to enlarge their roles the longer they stay in a position, whereas supervisory staff are more apt to more concretely define their roles. If this is the case, there was a possibility that the president's initiatives could have difficulty infiltrating the community college culture through the supervising ranks and to

the non-supervising employees who are in this case the staff and faculty (Blanchard, et al., 2001).

The scope of exposure the subjects had to the workings of the college and the lenses they were using to interpret it varied a great deal. Five out of the five faculty and two of the five staff had either job responsibilities or were engaged in committees that exposed them to college wide workings. Three participants other than the president shared with the researcher that they had obtained advanced degrees in administration be it in higher education administration or administration in their own fields.

When reviewing the findings, the context of the case being studied represents a vital key to understanding. As Stake (1995) relates:

Issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts. All these meanings are important in studying cases. Issues draw us toward observing, even teasing out, the problems of the case, the conflictual outpourings, and the complex backgrounds of human concern. (p. 17)

For this study's participant community college, a good degree of its context centered around established identity, values, and ways of working, that had been and continued to be challenged to the point that the college could no longer do things the way they had always done them. The new president actively was working to facilitate cultural change that would empower those within the college not only to weather the current state of flux, but to operate in an organizationally

more fluid way. This study measured the perceived degree to which the college had been able to achieve characteristics that indicate a fluid operating environment, and the perceived state of workplace quality, which, according to literature, buttresses achievement and sustainability of fluid practices.

4.3 Findings

By utilizing triangulation, pattern matching, and convergence of evidence as suggested by Yin (2009), coupled with deliberate disconfirmation of findings as per Stake (1995), eight essential findings were determined. They were as follows:

- 1) High quality work environment coded rankings consistently ranked between active and fluid states, whereas organizational fluidity variables consistently ranked between static and active, but leaned more toward static states.
- 2) Subjects often perceived organizational fluidity and workplace quality variables differently with regard to their immediate supervisors compared to managers and leadership across the college.
- 3) Faculty and staff experienced organizational fluidity and workplace quality variables in different ways.
- 4) Collaboration, communication, and information sharing across the college consistently ranked low amongst the faculty, staff, and president's responses.

- 5) Faculty and staff consistently articulated a passion for their jobs and what they do in them.
- 6) The president was consciously aware of the majority of issues with regard to the concepts studied, and in many cases was in conversation at multiple hierarchical levels regarding addressing these issues.
- 7) Participants consistently did not communicate the institutional goals in terms of their own work.
- 8) Organizational fluidity and workplace quality concepts resonated with participants. However, some terms consistently needed translated to be relevant to the community college environment.

Since many of the findings will be articulated through use of coded variables, it is first necessary to clarify the general differentiation between the three coded states. A 1 represents a static state. In this environment, status quo is the modus operandi. Everyone is primarily concerned with what is coming in the door rather than being proactive. Operations are day-to-day, and often reactive. A 2 represents an active state. In an active state, the management is somewhat engaged. There are some managers who are looking at the environment holistically, and are engaged in building the organization's capacity through both organizational structure and through human resource cultivation. However, in an active state not all managers are tending this way; it is not consistent, and is not the norm across the college. For a ranking of 3, all managers are operating in this way.

Figure 4.1 on the following page illustrates the coded data means for each of the tested organizational fluidity and high quality work environment variables. The Likert-scaled statements utilized in the semi-structured interviews may be found in Appendices A and B, and the code book in Appendix C. The yellow arrows in the figure represent the mid-point of the range. The following finding sections will interpret this data in relation to the coded data, interviews, college documents, and researcher observations.

Figure 4.1 Coded Means Comparison



4.3.1 Finding 1: High quality work environment coded rankings consistently ranked between active and fluid states, whereas organizational fluidity variables consistently ranked between static and active, but leaned more toward static states. (RQ1, RQ2)

In evaluating the means of faculty and staff responses, both groups perceived the college as primarily being in an active state with regard to high quality work environment variables (*above the lower yellow arrow in Figure 4.1*), and in a static state in regard to organizational fluidity variables (*below the upper yellow arrow in Figure 4.1*). Faculty indicated that only one organizational fluidity variable had a mean rank within the active range and none in the fluid range. They placed workplace quality variables primarily in the active range, with the exception of one in the fluid range and two in the static range. The staff coded rankings likewise placed the majority of workplace quality variables in the active range. None were in the fluid range, and two were in the static range. Out of twelve possible organizational fluidity variables, staff ranked all but three of the in the static range. None were in the fluid range.

To illustrate the current state of the college with regard to fluidity and workplace quality and to form possible recommendations, it is helpful to examine in more specificity both the variables that are the strongest and may require only maintenance compared with those that are in need of the most investment if they are to achieve a fluid state as defined in current literature.

Variables with a coded value of 2.5 or higher represent the strong operating characteristics. A 2.5 is midway between an active state, which is a coded value of 2, to a fluid state, which is a coded value of 3. Faculty values falling in this category were:

Table 4.1 Strong Operating Characteristics – Faculty

Ranking	Variable	Concept
3.0	Freedom to do your job	HQWE
2.8	People treat you with respect	HQWE
2.8	Job gives a sense of accomplishment	HQWE
2.8	Managers treat failure as a learning opportunity rather than something to be ashamed of	OF
2.6	Sense of job security	HQWE

Note: OF – Organizational Fluidity HQWE – High Quality Work Environment

Staff values above 2.5 were:

Table 4.2 Strong Operating Characteristics - Staff

Ranking	Variable	Concept
2.8	Freedom to do your job	HQWE
2.6	Job allows for work/life balance	HQWE
2.6	Work is interesting	HQWE
2.6	Job gives a sense of accomplishment	HQWE
2.6	People in their workplace are helpful and friendly	HQWE

Note: OF – Organizational Fluidity HQWE – High Quality Work Environment

The indicators with the most room for improvement ranged from a value of 1.0 to 1.5. This represents coded values from a strongly static state to ones that are halfway towards an active state. Out of 27 responses, staff rated eight variables in this category (Figure 4.3) and the faculty (Figure 4.4) only four variables.

Staff:

Table 4.3 Indicators in Need of Improvement - Staff

Ranking	Variable	Concept
1.5	Managers are willing and able to take prudent risks	OF
1.4	Managers quickly replicate best practices across organizational boundaries	OF
1.4	Managers hold people accountable for their performance	OF
1.4	Managers set challenging and aggressive goals	OF
1.2	Managers issue creative challenges to their people instead of narrowly defined tasks	OF
1.2	Chances for career advancement are good	HQWE
1.0	Managers have access to needed information	OF
1.0	Managers encourage hard work with incentives	OF
1.0	Managers use business goals and performance measures	OF

Note: OF – Organizational Fluidity HQWE – High Quality Work Environment

Faculty:

Table 4.4 Indicators in Need of Improvement - Faculty

Ranking	Variable	Concept
1.4	Managers hold people accountable for their performance	OF
1.2	Managers quickly replicate best practices across organizational boundaries	OF
1.2	Managers encourage hard work with incentives	OF
1.2	Managers have access to needed information	OF

Note: OF – Organizational Fluidity HQWE – High Quality Work Environment

As you can see, all of the variables characterized under this status by faculty were likewise perceived by staff as needing improvement.

4.3.2 Finding 2: Subjects often perceived organizational fluidity and workplace quality variables differently in regard to their immediate supervisors compared to their managers and high level leadership across the college. (RQ1, RQ2)

Although the quantitative statements in the study focused on management tendencies as an aggregate across the community college, before many of the subjects would respond they clarified that there was a difference between their immediate supervisor(s) and supervisors college-wide. In fact, four of the five staff participants did so, and two of the five faculty. A staff member said very directly:

And again, when you say managers, let's be really clear here, because that is going to help me with my responses to you. If you are talking about my immediate supervisor, that is very different than if you are talking about (a) vice president . . . So we'll say microcosm, macrocosm.

Another characteristic example of this is the following faculty member's response to the statement "Managers in my organization devote considerable effort to developing subordinates":

Again, my manager is probably like, what I observe him doing, especially with new team members, I would give him a 7. Uhm, and what I hear . . . and you know, 4 or 5 probably for the organization."

Of the participants who chose to differentiate, the perceptions of their immediate supervisors were significantly more positive across the board than those of supervisors and leadership across the college. This is particularly interesting since the participants

represented home departments across the institution. They all said that their immediate areas were family like, there was good communication, and there was a good deal of respect. However, what they heard is that it is not this way for everyone. Two people falling in this category, one from the faculty and one from the staff, have been involved in the Open Minds Group, and would include the president along with their immediate supervisor when characterizing positive managerial attributes, but not deans or the vice presidents.

4.3.3 Finding 3: Faculty and staff experienced organizational fluidity and workplace quality variables in different ways. (RQ1, RQ2)

As is evidenced in the findings discussion thus far, faculty and staff perceived and experienced the same institutional environment in different ways. When looking at the ranges between coded faculty and staff means, several variables have rating differences of at least .5 out of a possible range between 0 and 2. They are:

Table 4.5 Significant Range Differences

Var. #	Range	Variable	F / S >	Concept
1	.8	Managers issue creative challenges to their people instead of narrowly defined tasks	F	OF
2	.8	Managers use business goals and performance measures	F	OF
3	.8	Ability to choose your own schedule	F	HQWE
4	.6	Managers treat failure as a learning opportunity rather than something to be ashamed of	F	OF
5	.6	Strength of colleges commitment to you	F	HQWE

Note: OF – Organizational Fluidity HQWE – High Quality Work Environment
 F / S > - Faculty (F) or Staff (S) indicated as having a higher (>) range value

The following will discuss each of these five variables from both the staff and faculty perspectives to reveal the nature of such differences.

Variance 1: Issuing creative challenges

In coding responses to the statement “Managers issue creative challenges to their people instead of narrowly defining tasks”, a 1, 2, and 3 were characterized as follows:

- 1 - Few creative challenges are presented by management. Managers expect employees to complete their work in a relatively prescribed fashion.
- 2 - Periodically employees are encouraged to recommend new ways of performing tasks and approaching work.
- 3 - Managers regularly and actively engaged in activities that encouraged employees to design new and innovative/creative ways of doing tasks, solving problems, influencing stakeholder discussions, and arranging the organizational conditions to do so.

The staff mean was 1.2 and the faculty mean 1.8, which is at opposite ends of the static state.

With this variable, staff had two different experiences. Two of the three who fell in the first group were able to be creative in their work, and stressed that this was an intrinsic characteristic of theirs so regardless of any encouragement they would always be looking for better ways of doing things. It is just part of who they are. Their managers were not actively encouraging these behaviors. One of those two felt that he was taking

initiative to creatively problem solve in spite of his supervisor and the inflexibility of the organizational structures around him. Barriers for him included an inflexible work schedule and the perception of “ideas being shot down, because one person in a position of power has a preference in another direction”. The second person said that she often made changes to make improvements, but ranked this variable a three out of seven, because employees needed to be self-motivated to do so. The third person had the opportunity to creatively problem solve and was encouraged by her immediate supervisor. The second group in the staff category consisted of two individuals. This group felt that although they would like to engage in creative activities and that it was definitely needed, people were just too overworked to be able to take the time to step back and be creative. One of them said:

You are just trying to survive and get the work done, or at least be a little less behind. And yet, innovation kind-of takes a nose dive. And yet you need it. You need the innovation in order to deal with the changes that are happening, but unfortunately when you over work people and they, they are feeling, uhm, uh, tired and exhausted and, and, ah . . . yeah, it is kind-of hard to come up with innovative problem solving.

All of them felt that creativity was vital to being able to acclimate and be proactive in the high flux environment they have been experiencing in the past several years. Every staff member interviewed spoke very energetically about the possibility of coming up with ways to better serve faculty, students, and the college, but were all experiencing barriers that excluded this type of behavior from becoming the norm.

Faculty ranked this variable closer to an active state than staff. What is interesting is that their narratives indicated that they experienced more freedom than the staff and were regularly called upon to be creative in their collective and individual work. All of the faculty in the study were involved on committees, developed curriculum, and were given general challenges to find solutions to both local challenges like classroom space sharing and larger challenges such as national initiative implementation. One faculty member said:

Faculty are treated as professional individuals who are, who have a breadth and depth of knowledge in their fields, and, and the faculty are pretty much then free to develop the classes as they see what is appropriate.

Another said:

We are all highly skilled and I think all of us continue to grow, become more skilled, and we often share new technology, new science, new ways of thinking truly. Certainly we are becoming a little more tech savvy, and need to be in all industries. . . . We have a very free work environment where we can all filter together.

The three limitations that surfaced included increasingly inflexible frameworks that course curriculum must fall within, lack of guidance coupled with an acceptance of complacency, and faculty schedules not always meshing in a way that people were available to work together at the same time. Three people expressed that if you intrinsically operated as a creative problem solver, you had the leeway to do so. If you did not, there was no pressure or encouragement to

experiment or engage. One faculty member noted that there was a “huge distinction between middle management and the President”. He said that the president operated this way, but that middle management was often task focused due to over-work.

While faculty and staff both evaluated the college as being in a static state, the degree to which this was their experience clearly varied. Staff play different roles than faculty. By the very nature of the faculty role, and the way they are engaged in this college, faculty have more of an opportunity to regularly experience creative challenges as part of their jobs. For staff, this type of activity is initiated by the individual even more than for faculty. They often found it difficult to set the time and space aside to come up with or to implement ideas that would help them make the workload they are experiencing more effective and efficient, and when they did so felt that they may be met with managerial resistance.

Variance 2: Use of business goals and performance measures

The statement “Managers use business goals and performance measures” was coded using the following criteria:

- 1 - Subject has little awareness of business goals and performance measures.
- 2 - Business goals and performance measures are addressed purely through a reporting or compliance stance.
- 3 - Managers strive to align activities to goals and measures. They are also regularly participate in unit discussions and employee awareness.

Similarly to the creative challenges statement, faculty and staff rated the institution in a static state. However the faculty rated it closer to an active state than did the staff. The faculty mean was 1.8 and staff mean was 1.0. Because this element is also an essential finding, it will be discussed in further detail under Finding 7.

Variance 3: Ability to determine schedules

Faculty and staff also varied in their perception of their ability to determine their schedules. The coding criteria for this variable were:

- 1- Employee schedules are largely determined by management, and deviation from these schedules is frowned upon.
- 2 - Some opportunity to select one's own schedule exists. Flex schedules, delayed start times, and/or 1/2 hour lunches are allowed with managerial permission.
- 3 - Employees have a high degree of schedule flexibility. There may be some time constraints, but for the most part individuals are able to work when and the length of time they need to work to get the job done. Working remotely may be an option.

Although schedule flexibility ranked in the active status range for faculty and the static range for staff, the reasoning given for this was related to job responsibilities. Faculty have a high degree of freedom to modify their schedules unless there is a class that is only offered at a certain time. This was particularly the case for faculty teaching evening classes. Although staff had less flexibility, because they were often in more of a full time service role to faculty, other staff, and students consistently throughout their

working day, as long as they were candid about needing to be away and worked with others to make sure their area was covered, they had this ability. The staff mean was 1.6, and the faculty's was 2.4.

Variance 4: Failure as a learning opportunity

Coding ranks for this variable were as follows:

- 1 - Non-accomplishment of work objectives by employees are treated as failures with no evaluation of potential causes of the failure or ways to improve.
- 2 - Employee failure is viewed as somewhat acceptable and a part of doing business; however, little evaluation for improving misactions and misjudgment is conducted. Learning from the experience is not pursued.
- 3 - Failure is viewed as a learning opportunity. Experimentation is encouraged, and results examined to determine what can be gleaned from the experience to improve overall performance.

Faculty and staff placed this variable in the active status. Staff placed it low at a 2.2 and faculty high at 2.8. 3 would have been a fluid state. Three faculty absolutely agreed that failures were treated as learning opportunities. The first of these three felt that failure was not treated as something to be ashamed of. However, much to her chagrin nothing followed successful or failed experimentation. She would like to see encouragement beyond the acceptance of the intrinsic motivation of a few individuals. Additionally she felt that it should be a cultural expectation for people to engage in these activities, to then follow-up afterward to identify what can be learned from the

experimentation, and to potentially develop the findings into best practices for and with others in the institution. The second faculty member replied that the way the situation would be handled really depended on the manager.

The staff were split on this. One of them said that in their area, they just don't talk about failed experimentation. If it were to happen she was sure that a failure would be treated as a learning opportunity. Of the remaining two, one of whom worked at a branch campus and one who was on the main campus, said that failure did sometimes happen. When it did, the situation was discussed along with "what didn't happen", and they brainstormed about what could have been a more successful solution. It appears that as with the faculty experience, the degree to which failure is treated as a learning opportunity varies depending on the area.

Variance 5: Organizational commitment

The final variance between faculty and staff was in regard to the degree of commitment they perceived the college had to them. Coded ranking values were:

- 1 - Employees perceive little commitment to them by the organization.
- 2 - Employees feel that organizational leaders care about them in the day-to-day.

However, when the difficult decisions are made, employee wellbeing is low on the list of consideration.

- 3 - Employees feel that no matter what, organizational leadership has their best interests at heart. Uncomfortable decisions may be made, but the welfare of employees is a primary consideration.

The faculty had a mean coded value of 2.2, whereas the staff had a mean of 1.6. Worth noting is that the president pointed out that the response to this and several other Likert statements could be negatively influenced by the classified employee contract negotiations that had just concluded at the time the interviews were conducted and the fact that they were at the very end of the academic year.

Regarding organizational commitment, staff and faculty were similar in that they emphasized that they regularly heard messages letting them know how valuable they were to the college, but that they felt a large degree of anonymity with regard to leadership beyond their immediate supervisors. Four of the staff felt more of a commitment from the college two presidents ago. The style of the last one and the current one are perceived as having a lack of face-to-face interaction. It was felt that the president and upper leadership are not getting needed information or letting people know they are appreciated. One staff participant said:

Well, I, well some of it had to do with we changed in presidents a couple of times. The, the last couple haven't been . . . they say the right things, but they don't . . . they don't get out of their office to. You know, one president we had, he walked and walked around departments and talked to people. He knew everybody. And, uhm, you know, he acted like you were friends or whatever, and he would just kind-of b.s. with you. The last ones just don't do that. They don't kind-of get out, and so you don't feel as appreciated when you, you, they don't even, they make decisions

on the ah, they, sometimes they have no clue about what is going on, because they don't get out.

Two of the faculty expressed the same sentiment. With this comment, interviewees usually followed this sentiment up with a caveat that the amount of work administrators are being asked to do may preclude them from being able to take the time to invest in this type of relationship building and maintenance. They felt that it was not that administrators did not want to establish these relationships or lacked the knowledge of how to foster their people more, rather, they were limited by the amount of work they needed to do.

Additional factors that influenced staff to reflect a ranking mean between static and active states for this variable were a) the sense that there was what one subject referred to as the presence of a caste system between faculty and staff, and b) that to them budget cuts seemed to disproportionately affect staff. Staff and faculty both commented that staff have less status on campus and may not be being given the respect that they deserve for their competency and good work. When coupled with the cuts, this is very difficult for the staff. Regarding the cuts, one person said that the administration's heart is there, but staffing is the easiest place to cut, which makes it very difficult for staff to feel a commitment to them. They believe strongly in the services they provide and equate disproportionate budget cuts as a demonstration of where the most value is placed by the college.

Faculty ranked this between an active and static state, but very close to a static state. Responses were often expressed that the college was committed to them, even

though they were experiencing the harsh realities of their economic situation. Cuts and difficult decisions were being made out of necessity, not a lack of commitment. With the exception of one, they felt highly respected, which translated to them to commitment. One said: “I think that the campus as a whole institution understands that faculty members are what make the institution work. And when, keeping them happy is probably good for the institution.” The one who did not, agreed with the staff in feeling a degree of anonymity. He said that he works very hard for the college, is dedicated to the students, and would appreciate someone stopping by and letting them know that they noticed. To him, institutional commitment was shown by hearing the stories and experiences of staff, faculty, and students. For the faculty, a sense of job security did not result from feeling administrative commitment, it came from the fact that they were high performing and taught courses that were in niches that were not easy to fill.

Variation 4.3.3 summary

Faculty and staff often had different vantage points. Their functions are different; often the way they receive information is different, and the regulations and contracts they are under are different. Some of the variance appears structural in nature, but some of the distinction between the two is also cultural. An example of structural considerations would be variance caused by positions that require job duties to be consistently done in a certain way at certain times, or conversely that have a high degree of flexibility with regard to schedules and delivery. Cultural elements would be represented by social norms and such as status based on role or educational attainment. This experiential difference

consistently showed that, when evaluating the organizational fluidity and high quality work environment variables included in this study, when there was a range differentiation of .5 or higher between faculty and staff, faculty consistently leaned higher in their coded rankings than staff.

4.3.4 Finding 4: Collaboration, communication, and information sharing across the college consistently ranked low amongst the faculty, staff, and president’s responses. (RQ1, RQ2)

Statements sampling internal stakeholder perceptions regarding communication, collaboration, and information sharing were included in the study. They were: managers in my organization have access to the information they need to make good decisions, there is good communication among coworkers, and people in my workplace are helpful and friendly. This being said, themes around communication inextricably wove through the entirety of each of the interviews. Communication responses formed focal points in five areas: larger policy and decision making, smaller, more local decision making, informal interaction, lateral communication within the college, and between hierarchical organizational levels.

Laterally inside individuals’ own departments, as was illustrated in Finding 2, both faculty and staff spoke about the communication in their immediate areas as being very high, but college wide very low. With their departmental colleagues, descriptions of collegial, supportive, and open relationships were common. Local to their area, faculty often worked together to determine curricular decisions, facility sharing, student interventions, and ways to co-address barriers they may be facing. Staff also collaborated

this way, but the topics related more to service delivery and modification of precise processes. Within the local realm for both, interactions often were either informal, or happened in department meetings.

When reflecting upon college wide communication, collaboration, and information flow, faculty and staff talked about departments being siloed. Information and best practices were often not shared, which could sometimes be frustrating when programs were linked, but not keeping each other abreast of processes, changes, or information vital for serving others in a seamless fashion. This was especially the case for the individual at the branch campus. This person, had trouble getting information from departments that offered classes at their center. The branch campus faculty and staff could not always access things like financial aid information for students taking classes after 4:30, and were not receiving some of the announcements circulated on the main campus. A faculty member, who taught evening classes, also did not receive information that he would have liked to, even from within the department. He said that nothing was intentionally withheld, it was just that people either thought he already knew or it was something that had been discussed informally before he got to campus and was not forwarded to him. One faculty member said that this disconnect is felt most strongly by part time faculty that are often on campus only to teach their classes and leave. Part time faculty represents 60% - 70% of many departments. Interestingly enough, the participants were from across the institution, and all expressed the desire and high degree of willingness to collaborate, but also consistently felt that other areas did not.

In response to replication of best practices across organizational boundaries, the coded mean for faculty was 1.4 and for staff 1.2. Both values are at the lower end of the static range of the scale. Additionally, there was a high degree of reticence to initiating best practices from one area of the college to another. A staff member lamented:

I think there is an attempt to do so, but there is a good deal of resistance across those boundaries. Uhm, and part of the culture of the colleges as a whole is we don't really like change, and it is very difficult for us.

Several people mentioned that they are going through so much change and just trying to keep up, that just getting students served is taking everything they have. They would like to collaborate, there just was not the time or energy to be able to put toward it.

Lack of perceived collaboration and relationship building between upper leadership (deans, vice-presidents, the president, and special committees) and the rest of the college echoed through staff and faculty responses. There was only one faculty member from the whole sample who did not mention this. It is not so much that leadership does not want to, or as one person put it “are not good people”, the cause was attributed to the perception that they are overworked and cannot do as much as they would like to. This has fostered a lot of distrust. One faculty member also suggested that the self titled “secret committee” may not have been the best idea. Faculty and staff did not feel that leadership was getting enough information about what was happening on the ground level to make sound decisions. Two faculty members suggested that even if leadership cannot share some information or reasoning, sharing reasons why they are

doing so would go a long way in building more trust. They said that in the absence of information, people tend to create it. This was particularly important to all of the participants especially now, because of the high flux and uncertain environment that they are in.

4.3.5 Finding 5: Faculty and staff consistently articulated a passion for their jobs and what they do in them. (RQ1, RQ2)

All of the faculty and all of the staff spoke about how satisfying their jobs were. Indicator variables with regard to a feeling of accomplishment and how interesting their work was scored in the high end of the active range. Two of the staff and three of the faculty literally and emphatically said, “I love my job!” The value, which to them is indeed invaluable, is based in altruism.

Staff conveyed how much satisfaction they receive from making huge differences in students’ lives right at the very point in time where they may need it most. One participant said:

I love my work. I love (*the service she provides*). (*My service*) has been a passion for many years, and it is because of my life experience. Kind-of value education. I know how important it is . . . I feel like I make a difference in people’s lives very directly. . . . Front lines. I am on the front lines. People go through a job loss, divorce, some major life transition. I am a lot of times the first one they encounter.

One staff member extended his scope to include service to faculty and other staff. In response to the statement probing how interesting he perceived his work to be, he said:

It really is. Yep, knowing I'm impacting thousands of people's learning experiences . . . Knowing I'm facilitating on all different levels . . . people bettering their lives. And not just students, because knowing I'm helping make instructors make their careers better and more effective is interesting to me.

They all talked about appreciating the people around them, and how privileged they felt to be there. Working anywhere else was inconceivable.

Faculty expressed the same sentiments. What mattered the most to them was student success. They liked the academic freedom they had and getting others as excited about their fields as they were. Two of them talked about these aspects, but then noted that they were getting a bit tired. As “socially redeeming” as what they did was, they were personally ready to engage in some of their own passions more. It was not anything about the college; it was just the point of their life they were in.

Faculty and staff alike wanted to make sure the researcher knew that as much as they are frustrated with some things, and have expressed room for improvement, they had never had a better job. They were committed to the college and to doing what they did in the area they did it. Many of them had been offered promotions, but were not interested because their work was so worthwhile to them that they did not want to leave it. Several

also knew that they could make more money elsewhere, but could not see why they would want to.

4.3.6 Finding 6: The president is consciously aware of the majority of issues with regard to the concepts studied, and in many cases was in conversation at multiple hierarchical levels regarding addressing these issues. (RQ1, RQ2)

In comparing the connections and disconnects between the president's perceptions and those of the staff and faculty, 2/3 of his organizational fluidity and 1/2 of workplace quality coded rankings had a range of below .5. Of the three variables for faculty and the two variables for the staff that were above 1.0, the president ranked the variables as being higher. Of those below 1.0, the five of the eight faculty responses ranked higher than the president's, and for the staff, they ranked five out of the ten higher. When looking at this data, keep in mind that the organizational fluidity measures represent the subject's perception of managerial tendencies throughout the college and that workplace quality variables measure independent perceptions. For the workplace quality variables, the president was predicting the situation for the faculty and the staff independently. Table 4.6 illustrates this in more detail for the faculty and Table 4.7 for staff.

Table 4.6: Faculty / President Range Comparison

	Faculty	President	Faculty/ Presid. Range	Concept
"Stretching" subordinates	1.8	3.0	1.2	OF
Provide recognition	1.8	3.0	1.2	HQWE
Provide needed training	2.0	3.0	1.0	HQWE
Use business goals & performance measures	1.8	1.0	0.8	OF
Job allows for work/life balance	2.2	3.0	0.8	HQWE
Culture of respect	2.8	2.0	0.8	HQWE
Sense of accomplishment	2.8	2.0	0.8	HQWE
Failure treated as a learning opportunity	2.8	2.0	0.8	OF
Ability to select working schedules	2.4	3.0	0.6	HQWE
Decisions made at lowest appropriate level	1.6	1.0	0.6	OF
Encourage skill & ability development	2.4	3.0	0.6	HQWE

 President's response < than faculty

Table 4.7: Staff / President Range Comparison

	Staff	President	Staff/ Presid. Range	Concept
Provide needed training	1.8	3.0	1.2	HQWE
"Stretching" subordinates	2.0	3.0	1.0	OF
Opportunity for career advancement	1.2	2.0	0.8	HQWE
Issue creative challenges	1.2	2.0	0.8	OF
Decisions made at lowest appropriate level	1.8	1.0	0.8	OF
Freedom to do ones job	2.8	2.0	0.8	HQWE
Provide recognition	2.2	3.0	0.8	HQWE
Encourage skill & ability development	2.4	3.0	0.6	HQWE
Interesting work	2.6	2.0	0.6	HQWE
Sense of accomplishment	2.6	2.0	0.6	HQWE
Helpful & friendly workplace	2.6	2.0	0.6	HQWE
Management's ability to take risk	1.5	2.0	0.5	OF

 President's response < than staff

Although the scoring may be different between the president and faculty or staff, for the most part the scores were relatively similar. Only four variables had a range of more than 1.0. The importance of this, is that for the most part the president is aware of faculty and staff perceptions, and with regard to organizational fluidity measures in particular, can see that there is a lot of work to be done.

The areas of concern that faculty and staff indicated as in the most need of improvement and a lower static state (1.0 – 1.5 coded values) were discussed in Finding 1. Six of the president's variables were coded within that range as well. Of these, five of them were included in the staff responses, and all four of the faculty responses. The president did reflect that he felt that managers should be doing better at pushing decisions down to the lowest appropriate level. The staff mean was 1.8, which is still below the active level, and for the faculty it was 1.6, which is just 0.1 above being included in this category. Table 4.8 compares this categorical inclusion more specifically. (Continued on following page.)

Table 4.8: Nine Areas of Concern

	Variable	F	S	P	Concept
1	Managers are willing and able to take prudent risks		X		OF
2	Managers quickly replicate best practices across organizational boundaries	X	X	X	OF
3	Managers hold people accountable for their performance	X	X	X	OF
4	Managers set challenging and aggressive goals		X		OF
5	Managers issue creative challenges to their people instead of narrowly defined tasks		X		OF
6	Chances for career advancement are good		X		HQWE
7	Managers have access to needed information	X	X	X	OF
8	Managers encourage hard work with incentives	X	X	X	OF
9	Managers use business goals and performance measures		X	X	OF
10	Managers push decisions down to the lowest appropriate level			X	OF

OF – Organizational Fluidity, HQWE – High Quality Work Environment
 F – Faculty, S – Staff, P – President

Even though the rankings show that four of the variables do not fall within the same classification for the president, he did rank the other six variables faculty and staff included in the active category, which indicates that some of the characteristics of this category are being met, but they are not consistent across the institution. In the interview with the president, each item was also currently being addressed. Final solutions may not have been determined yet, or implemented, but discussions as to how to address barriers were taking place at both the higher administrative level, and also through multiple levels throughout the hierarchy including the Open Minds Group (OMG), which was open to everyone.

The president spoke knowing that the college was in a transitional state that was not yet into what this study characterizes as a fluid state. He is utilizing a double pronged strategy to facilitate this change. The first method is “creating space for innovation”, which in turn disrupts some existing community/college structures. The challenge he mentioned with this is that there is a propensity for any community experiencing this to naturally deflect the innovation. This is where the second method comes into play. This is complex adaptive systems. With this approach stimulus is provided which drives change through adaptation rather than imposition. The adaptation needs very little structure.

The main area of resistance to this change is perceived by the president as being middle management. He said:

Again, this is informed by my reading on change theory. I think that to a great extent, our classified staff are eager to make these changes. I think that although they would not be aware of this in themselves, our main area of resistance is mid-level management. And that fits the theory, because they are defined by the bureaucratic structure that currently exists.

Classifieds aren't. Faculty aren't. So while you may think interestingly that your unionized groups are the ones that are going to be resistant, certainly the structure of the contracts create challenges for us, but for the people the people themselves, they'll. Uhm. So yah, I have, I have lots of mid-level management that likes us to play by the rules, because that's

how they have their authority. And, I would rather have them feel authority based on their commitment to a purpose.

It is not that he feels that all managers are in this place. In fact, he feels that some are at the exact opposite end of the spectrum and are “just on fire” with their creative energy and encouragement of the very variables we have been addressing in this study. It is just not consistent across the college. He sees his role in achieving fluidity as not being that dissimilar to a preacher or a prophet. He explained that in this capacity

you have a vision, and your job is to . . . find words and ways that help other people to see that vision, because you believe that if they see it, they will seek it. And so, (his) job is to create a culture that’s passionate about that vision. (*President’s interview*)

The vision he is referring to is to rally around a common goal. That goal is supporting student success toward degree and certificate completion.

The president characterized the college as being at a critical point in the organizational change process. He talked about the sense of loss and grief that comes with losing the old way of doing things. It is the time that people try to defend these old ways most avidly. This is the way they know, which is much more comfortable than moving to a new way of doing things that is unknown. He refers to it as an almost panicked time. Some people move quickly with the change and others take longer to see the value and perhaps realize that the old way is no longer an option. To him and according to the change management theory to which he adheres, this point is particularly

critical because if you do not successfully make the transition the probability of becoming recalcitrant in the old ways is very high.

4.3.7 Finding 7: Participants consistently did not communicate the institutional goals in terms of their own work. (RQ1, RQ2)

The statement “Managers use business goals and performance measures” was coded using the following criteria:

- 1 - Subject has little awareness of business goals and performance measures.
- 2 - Business goals and performance measures are addressed purely through a reporting or compliance stance.
- 3 - Managers strive to align activities to goals and measures. They are also regularly part of unit discussions and employee awareness.

The faculty mean was 1.8 and staff mean was 1.0.

Faculty readily knew the college performance goals and measures. With the exception of one person, they readily applied it to describing their work. The person who did not said that their home department functioned differently than other areas, and therefore the college goals did not relate to them. One person said that managers did not use performance goals and measures, but that she knew about them due to committee involvement. Another faculty member said that managers did use them, but that they were not being used effectively. He felt that rather than measuring effectiveness in terms of student learning, which was the most important outcome, the goals and measures were all financially and reporting based. Another faculty member laughed when asked to rank the statement. He said, “I think they really, really avoid it really . . . bad.”

Only one staff member could articulate the college wide goal of completion, which is the vision just discussed as being strongly emphasized by the president. To be able to provide an answer, and to give management the benefit of the doubt, some staff members said that managers must be using performance measures and goals, but that they really did not know. In trying to find an answer, three people stated that although they were unaware of performance goals and measures, the college did do performance reviews, but then continued that they have not had one in years. One person said that their unit does some type of reporting for State and Federal agencies for reimbursement, so they must have some goals in that regard. Another person who worked at a branch campus assumed that this was most likely happening on the main campus, they just did not know about them at the branch campus. It was very clear given these responses that within the day-to-day workings of these units each of these focal areas were not being articulated to the staff in a way that resonated with them and what they do. Since staff lacked awareness of performance goals and measures, they were not intentionally aligning their everyday tasks and problem solving with college wide goals or measuring success in achieving them.

The president is aware of this disconnect. He felt that only some of the administration was articulating business goals and performance measures with their staff and faculty. This was soon going to change. Part of the motivation for becoming an “Achieving the Dream” college was to “force creation of an institutional biofeedback system”. He attributed part of the reasoning for managers not managing this way was that the data necessary to measure effectiveness is either not available with the data they

currently keep, or not available in the form that is needed. As the college moves forward with this initiative, leadership will invest in shifting the culture to more intentionally align its efforts.

4.3.8 Finding 8: Organizational fluidity and workplace quality concepts resonated with participants. However, some terms consistently needed to be translated to be relevant to the community college environment. (RQ3)

It was evident in administering the Likert-scaled statements that there were several concepts and motivations, that although they resonated with the participants needed to be translated to be more relevant within the community college environment. Two of the three participants with organizational behavior training along with the president exclaimed in the interview how good the statements were at gaining an understanding of the workings of the fluidity measures of the college. Of the 27 Likert statements used in the study, only three presented challenges in transferring present organizational fluidity and workplace quality concepts to the community college. The discrepancies between the business orientation of the original studies the scales were taken from and the community college environment were assumptions that: financial gain is a primary motivator for employees, that career advancement for faculty members is a relevant variable to them, and that hard work can be encouraged and rewarded through financial compensation.

The employees that were interviewed certainly cared that they were compensated, but the value by which they measured satisfaction was more related to the degree of

respect they perceived from their peers and the administration, the freedom to pursue their passions related to their job, and their ability to make a difference in people's lives. These elements were all captured elsewhere in the interviews since the workplace quality variables were added to the organizational fluidity variables. Had this not been done, these values would not have been captured. Several participants said that they could easily have continued working in the private sector and be paid a lot more, but why would they? They loved working at the participant community college. They had jobs that fulfilled them and what they wanted to accomplish with their lives.

Regarding faculty advancement, what advancement would look like to the participants interviewed was not clear. They felt that they were at the top in being full time faculty that had built up successful programs that served students well. Four of the five had mentioned that they had been asked to move into administrative positions, but they declined because in doing so they would move out of the classroom. For the staff career advancement capability was a definite concern. The coded ranking was 1.2. For the faculty, this was something that did not affect job satisfaction.

Use of incentives also had to be modified to take into consideration the fact the community college really cannot offer financial incentives. They do sometimes offer unofficial free time, freedom, perhaps money to contribute towards research or special projects faculty are working on, or additional encouragement to undertake additional training or other form of professional development.

4.4 Conclusion

By coupling an understanding of the college and the background of the participants, with data and the subjects voices a richer understanding is possible. The findings may not be generalized to all community colleges due to the sample size and the fact that other community colleges in other operating environments may respond differently. However, petit generalizations from the study can be made that are specific to this college.

The essential findings showed that by comparing responses across internal stakeholder groups, it was possible to see that different groups experience the same environment differently due to their roles and responsibilities. There are specific areas of improvement that organizational fluidity and high quality work environment suggest would help the college move more symbiotically with their operating environment, improve their human resources capacity, and support this transition. The president was intentionally moving organizational change in this direction, was aware of these issues, and also knows that they were in a transition phase at the time of this study. Finally, although a strong understanding was gleaned by using the existing organizational fluidity and high quality work environment scales and these concepts strongly resonated with participants, future theory development that takes into consideration the motivational factors specific to the community college environment could ease its application there.

Chapter 5: Conclusions & Discussion

Utilizing organizational fluidity and high quality work environment variables that offer defined key points within healthy organizational operating systems, this study examined internal stakeholder perspectives to identify connects and disconnects in achieving these variables at one case community college. By using existing organizational fluidity and high quality work environment Likert scales administered in a semi-structured interview format, key intervention areas were identified that according to prior scholarly work significantly contribute toward achieving the desired fluid state the college leadership that the case institution is actively engaged in creating. This fluid state actively engages stakeholders to create a sustainable organizational capacity that effectively and efficiently mitigates change, and at the same time capitalizes on the creative power individuals if they have the leeway to exercise it. The study is significant, because existing fluidity and high quality work environment studies have all been conducted in the for-profit business setting, but not non-profit, higher education, and more specifically community college environments. In addition to beginning to fill this gap, this study also offers the promise of elucidating pathways of understanding to form the basis of new tools for leaders in these areas to effectively and proactively address the massive amounts of change they are experiencing. Change, that is in fact, significant enough to be changing the very operating paradigms they are operating under.

By engaging the holistic perspective offered by fluidity and work environment quality theoretical models, the study examined the performance management structures, social supports, saliency of stakeholder involvement, and the degree of employee

satisfaction experienced at the college by staff and faculty. Further this feedback was compared to the President's predictions of their responses, his strategies in relation to addressing these variables, and his organizational vision. The triangulated findings described in Chapter 4, revealed several essential overarching themes that consistently surfaced throughout the findings. This chapter will detail each conclusion, offer recommendations, provide strategies for implementation, discuss the implications of the study, and suggest areas of future research.

5.1 Conclusions

Woven through the findings were four essential conclusions. Three of these conclusions represent areas of improvement and strength specifically for the case community college, and one is an area of improvement for fluidity and workplace quality assessment theory and practice. They are:

Conclusion 1: Organizational structures existed at the participant community college that may be barriers to achieving the desired fluid state.

Conclusion 2: Insufficient internal formal and informal communication college wide coupled with lack of consistent strategic alignment college wide creates significant confusion for internal stakeholders.

Conclusion 3: The high degree of workplace quality perceived at the college by staff and faculty could potentially support further progress toward realizing a fluid operating state.

Conclusion 4: For high quality workplace and organizational fluidity variables to more accurately describe the community college environment, community college specific terminology and motivations need to be reflected in the descriptive language.

These conclusions take into consideration the variable findings as well as the organizational implications they bring with them.

5.1.1 Conclusion 1: Organizational structures existed at the participant community college that may be barriers to achieving the desired fluid state. (RQ1, RQ2, F2, F6)

Although the college leadership was actively working toward achieving what is characterized in this study as a fluid state, the rankings of fluidity variables all scored very low in the static range. Barriers include: lack of support through the management ranks, a perceived inability to safely take risks, and a culture that does not actively reward these types of activities.

Even though staff and faculty wanted to experiment, fix broken processes, and find better ways of supporting students and other staff and faculty, there were processes that inhibited them. They have experienced several lay-offs, and so the solace they once had in the security of their employment is not what it once was. Performance reviews did not reward engagement in fluid processes, but did emphasize fulfillment of static and outdated position description related duties that are highly defined. This incongruity reinforces maintaining status quo. Likewise, the union contract, employment law, and many of the middle managers

emphasize these position descriptions as well. Subjects observed that even for the people who enjoyed experimentation and process improvement, the risks were now too great to engage in these types of behaviors. If these processes were brought into alignment, the ability and probability for faculty and staff to engage in fluid behaviors would increase.

Another prime example of a barrier is an endless overwork cycle at play that acts as a catch-22 for the college. With this barrier, staff and faculty are always so busy trying to keep up with day-to-day tasks, that they cannot take the time to improve the very ineffective and inefficient processes they have identified that keep them busy. Due to lack of time they also cite the inability to take advantage of training opportunities that similarly could offer insight into improving processes to do their jobs better and in less time. The language of overwork and overburden is now part of the culture and is often used as an explanation for things going awry and the reasoning given for why things are not getting done even if the actual reason is unknown.

For staff and faculty to be engaging in fluid behaviors, organizational structures and supports need to be in place and congruent with the desired outcomes. All of the faculty and staff subjects interviewed expressed a desire to operate this way, and the President is asking them to. However, current organizational boundaries preclude them from safely doing so.

5.1.2 Conclusion 2: Insufficient internal formal and informal communication college wide coupled with lack of consistent strategic alignment college wide creates significant confusion for internal stakeholders. (RQ1, RQ2, F2, F3, F4, F6, F7)

Equally important as the presence of structural barriers is the lack of strong college wide communication, collaboration, and information exchange. This vital web of interconnectivity is what allows an organization to flex cohesively with environmental change. Without these key drivers, components of the college cannot move as quickly, learn from each other, or move in tandem in one orchestrated direction.

Immediate supervisors were doing a fabulous job of building connection, trust and relationships with their immediate supervisees. This broke down as soon as the relationship extended beyond this sphere. The implications manifested in three ways: distrust of organization wide leadership, inability to institutionally align resources to synchronize with strategic direction, and lack of information sharing across organizational boundaries.

Distrust of organizational leadership began at the assistant dean and dean levels. More than anything, faculty and staff wanted leadership to form relationships with them. They wanted connection and individualized personal acknowledgement of the hard work they are doing. When these relationships are strong, leadership is more likely to hear information that is vital in their decision making, have a team that is moving forward in tandem, the ability to match individuals who are exploring similar areas of innovation, and have the cultivated the social context of support staff and faculty to venture into

uncharted waters. Faculty already had this to some degree, but staff rated these areas very low.

Of significant concern is the inability for staff and faculty to articulate organizational goals in terms of what it means in relation to their work. The President is articulating the goal of degree and certificate completion, but the staff and faculty are not measuring their investment in the tasks they are doing in terms of whether or not their day-to-day activity furthers this organizational goal. It is highly possible that since there is substantial debate in the community college community nationwide as to the feasibility of this goal and how applicable it is in the community college environment, that staff and faculty are likewise having the same debate. In fact, several participants intimated this. Many of them are having difficulty seeing how focusing on completion will meet their goal, which is to serve all of their students the best they can. To them the college goal and their goal are incongruent. It is important to note that currently the completion rate is less than 20% at this college, which is not uncommon. (*President's interview*) The philosophic change represents a very new direction in community college missions and prioritization. Nationally community college leaders have embraced this initiative, as have major funders. What the President knows is that the political and funding environments, regardless of any other factors, are making the completion agenda compulsory.

Another issue with this singular goal is that it also does not take into consideration the other operations of the college. The staff and faculty are both sending very strong and clear messages that they would like guidance as to what the broad operational game

plan is to weather the storm they are facing. The storm is characterized by very serious operational environment changes like budget cuts, high enrollment levels with an open access policy and insufficient funding, among others. The President and upper leadership have faith in the capacity of staff and faculty, but are not providing the general guidelines or mileposts to let them know if they are on track or even going in the right direction. The premise is that if leadership gets out of the way of staff and faculty, they will creatively innovate new ways of approaching these issues. While this could be true, from an organizational fluidity perspective without clear performance measures and goals, that are clearly articulated and used as alignment tools, staff and faculty may not have the structures they need to be particularly effective at this.

Finally with regard to communication, it was clear in the study that obstructions to cross boundary sharing were recognized by all of the subjects. Boundaries could be found around cultural assumptions and acceptance between programs with very different focal points, such as workforce development programs and those designed for students intending to matriculate into baccalaureate programs. However, they were also found at more granular levels between offices serving similar and interlinked processes, such as student services offices who were all serving the same students with different components of their educational experience. It was also the case between teaching and work shifts, and between locations. Beyond being a frustration for the faculty, staff, and most likely the students they serve, the environment is encouraging siloing behaviors. The ability to more optimally utilize resources, including innovative problem solving could be increased by encouraging relationships and collaboration to be established

between these groups. With these relationships can also come sharing of best practices, holistic understanding, and perhaps even an awareness of how well the college is actually doing.

5.1.3 Conclusion 3: The high degree of workplace quality perceived at the college by staff and faculty could potentially support further progress toward realizing a fluid operating state. (RQ1, RQ2, F1, F2, F5, F6)

The strength of the participant college's workplace quality, lends itself to a high degree of individual job satisfaction and loyalty. High workplace quality traits in an organization help foster higher degrees of trust and commitment, which in turn supports transition toward a fluid operating state. As was discussed in the literature review, a high degree of workplace quality in an institution of higher education is precisely what Birkinshaw and Gibson (2004) predicted. This was indeed what was found. People work at the community college, because they are committed to the difference they make in people's lives daily. Their motivations are not financial, but rather altruistic. Many of the optimal traits an organization with a fluid organization exhibits have to do with employees having a sense of value, satisfaction that what they do matters, and they wake up and go to work in the morning knowing that they will be able to contribute meaningfully to doing such important and fulfilling work.

Development of this deeply held meaning in one's work, and further, a collective deeply held meaning centered on an organization's work, is one of the hardest qualities for an organization to achieve. However, it is also one of the most powerful motivators

toward a common goal. In fact, Wheatley (2006) asserts that passion for a purpose overshadows leadership in its ability to achieve goals. If the college's organizational performance goals tie into this collective passion in a way that serves to clearly forward individuals' goals of serving students in a way that resonates with faculty and staff, the colleges most valuable asset will be tapped to serve all of the stakeholders combined. In this state, all stakeholders will find ways to achieve their goals regardless of structural institutional barriers or even barriers in the operating environment. It is indeed a positive point to coalesce around.

5.1.4 Conclusion 4: For high quality workplace and organizational fluidity variables to more accurately describe the community college environment, community college specific terminology and motivations need to be reflected in the descriptive language. (RQ3, F8)

For community college administrators to more clearly see themselves in organizational fluidity and workplace quality theory, the intrinsic motivators utilized in defining the characterizing variables need to shift from personal financial gain to fulfilling altruistic values. As discussed in the last conclusion, these values encompass deep satisfaction in contributing to societal good and satisfaction in fostering cognitive development, emotional growth, and sustainable stability in the lives of students and other faculty and staff. Current motivators included in fluidity measures reflect financial incentives as motivation for investing in activities characteristic of fluid behaviors. There

are still motivators in the community college environment, they are just not primarily fiscally related.

5.2 Recommendations

Recommendations for the participant community college to move toward a greater degree of fluidity are twofold. The first recommendation is to actively invest in reducing the structural barriers to organizational fluidity identified in this study. By doing so, the college stands a greater chance of encouraging the innovative experimentation they would like to see, and would move the organization toward a more sustainable, successful cultural shift. The second is to develop conscious strategy to improve both informal and formal communication college wide. This would enhance the dexterity of the organization, instill the sense of respect participants were asking for, provide alignment, and improve stakeholder relations. These strategies can be designed and implemented in tandem, and should infiltrate the day-to-day operations of the organization.

5.3 Implementation Strategies

The following will describe three interventions designed to implement both recommendations while simultaneously honoring the leadership style of the President. These interventions are designed to build upon the organizational strengths and commitments expressed by the participants. More specifically, they establish institutional goals at macro and micro levels, facilitate active institution wide engagement in process improvement, and set a cultural tone around a language and attitude of

potential rather than deficit. If done correctly, these interventions align the college's activities with a well communicated operational direction, provide meaningful opportunities to engage internal stakeholders, and reduce barriers to fluid behaviors at all hierarchical levels. Through participation in these initiatives, trust may be built, enthusiasm encouraged, and a greater degree of cross boundary collaboration encouraged.

5.3.1 Strategy 1: Integrated strategic planning

The first implementation strategy is to create an integrated strategic planning process. The key word here is integrated. It is integrated throughout all institutional activities, across all stakeholder types, into accountability processes, and is embedded within communications. During the study, participants repeatedly asked for direction from the leadership. They did not want to be told what to do, but they did want to have goals that could be used to align their work, and that represented a college wide strategy to build visible resilience to the tsunami of change they are feeling. The participant community college already has a strategic plan and is developing one based around a single goal; degree completion. The proposed intervention would build upon this and expand the scope to multiple goals that allow for incorporation of key operational strategies as well as student related outcomes. The new strategic framework would then allow internal stakeholders (staff, faculty, and administrators) to more directly, readily, and independently make decisions within their day-to-day work regardless of their function.

5.3.2 Strategy 2: Broad stakeholder engagement

Since the college already has a think tank type forum in place with the Open Minds Group (*modified to protect anonymity*), Strategy 2 will build upon what has already been started. The effort would be similar in that it is a cross collaborative venue that focuses on innovative thinking about how to meet the goals of the college. However, the current effort does not have a good deal of participation, and the acronym OMG, which in social media circles means “Oh My God!”, is now being applied to the committee itself. Also the OMG buttons are sending a less than positive message to stakeholders who may be unfamiliar with the double entendre. This revised forum would recognize the existing work done by the OMG, and maintain focus on percolating thinking around possibility, as does Strategy 1. Even in environments with very few financial resources, quite a bit can be done by rethinking how current processes are conducted, understanding who really needs what in what form, and repairing disconnects in operational flow. The best way to do this is by cross process, and indeed cross-organizational, communication.

Particularly now, since the prior format has not been well and widely received, finding a subject that resonates would be critical to encourage participation. The study participants all knew about the Open Minds Group. Although all of them were interested in engaging in these types of activities, very few of them participated, because they did not feel that it warranted prioritization in their schedule or that meaningful outcomes were being realized. One potential theme could revolve around solving the conundrum of overwork/overburden. This is a theme that as discussed is a major roadblock for them.

This would be process improvement focused, with outcomes and action items that would be communicated and coupled with accountability. To drive language, and create trust an outside facilitator would have to be utilized, because too much capital has been lost internally if the same people who initiated the prior process are seen as leading the discussion. If done correctly, this engagement process could also be used to build trust across the college, restore the feeling of positive momentum, create sustainable cross institutional collaboration with other projects, and jump start thinking around action stances rather than inaction centered on deficit.

Again, as with Strategy 1, the next step would be translating these ideas into implementation actions and communicated to let faculty, staff, and administrators know that participation is worthwhile, and does provide a venue to address relevant issues with which they are dealing. By advertising successes, faculty, staff, and managers can feel that positive things are happening at the college; rather than just budget cuts, there are actually positive, exciting developments as well that benefit them directly if they take part.

5.3.3 Strategy 3: Improvement of managerial connection & communication

The purpose of Strategy 3 is to enhance the capacity of both middle management and high-level administration to connect and more effectively communicate with faculty and staff. As it stands there is a good deal of mistrust of management by faculty and staff. It is not that they are incompetent, or that they do not align around the same goals that faculty and staff do. What is missing is connection with subordinates, communication, and practices that provide the organizational structures necessary for

fluidity. The administration is already planning on increasing many of these practices; especially since the college is working on participation in the “Achieving the Dream” program (accreditation reporting requires documentation of these very variables, and the new funding environment is driving change that requires these types of activities).

Strategy 3 helps to build awareness of the need for relationship building, incentivizes it, cultivates skill building in this area, and respects the introverted or extroverted nature of individual managers.

The first part of the process is to talk with managers to ascertain their reality and respectfully create buy-in. It is possible that there are other barriers that they experience in fostering these types of relationships, and managing the needed structural processes identified in the fluidity indicator portion of this study. Institutionally, it may be possible to quickly address some of these issues. This process would not be a series of complaining sessions, but, instead, discussions framed around what could be done to help administrators as well as staff and faculty facilitate these activities.

To improve managerial capacity, a two-pronged coaching approach could be used. The first would be a mandatory training to teach concepts relating to “Manager as Coach”. This training would be designed to stimulate managerial thinking around their role in developing the capacity of their people. It would also serve as a reminder of the college’s prioritization of this value. The second component is individual coaching for managers. Individual coaching could work with managers at their skill level, with the context that they experience in their area, and provide a confidential place to explore the areas that might be the most challenging for them.

As with Strategies I and II, the final step is to include the activities that are desired in an accountability or performance appraisal process. Again, this does not mean that assessment is entirely punitive. It is also the perfect arena to give praise for improvement. What is most important is that by incorporating it into appraisal, a clear message is sent that this is important to the college. Participating in these activities is a priority.

5.3.4 Implementation summary

The participant community college has a monumental strength in that its workplace quality is very high. All of the stakeholders who participated in this study expressed a deeply ingrained passion for what they do, the students they serve, and the college itself. The indicator variables were also all meaningful to them. By implementing the three strategies discussed (*Recommendation 1*), the concerns they expressed would be addressed, potentially moving the college to a more resilient and effective state, and effective communication (*Recommendation 2*) would fuel motivation and understanding around positive change. The crux of this capacity lies within the more full facilitation and development of their human resources along with alignment of their organizational structures to allow them to utilize this capacity.

5.4 Practical Implementation Commitments and Implications

The reality of implementing the cultural change necessary to move an organization from a static state to a fluid state is that it is incredibly difficult. It requires commitment, faith, and has many implications. Commitment lies in the hands of

everyone involved: faculty, staff, administration, and students. Faith encompasses faith in the process, faith in each other, and faith that it really is possible to create what you as a group envision. If either full commitment or faith are lacking, the transition will not work. The conundrum is that although this transition is tricky, it is absolutely necessary to build the organizational capacity needed to handle the inordinate amount of change administrators face on a day-to-day basis. Apart from fully capitalizing on human resources, which is critically important to both employees and to the organization, it may mean the difference between being effective at serving your mission or literally facing insolvency. This is now true for even public organizations that it was generally assumed would never fold once established in a community.

In looking at why it so difficult to enact this cultural shift, the short answer is that it is a very different way of working and supervising than the majority of us are used to. Managing with more traditional methods is what most supervisory structures are built around, and indeed what people who are administrators have been rewarded for by promotion. The President mentioned this in his interview. Also, at some level, status quo is always still possible. It may not work well, or serve well in the long term, but it is possible and comfortable. When venturing into the new, it is venturing into the unknown. Many people feel a sense that everything is in chaos, but in reality order at a higher level and norming does happen. Figuring out what this new way of working looks like on an individual level or even at a macro level takes aligned experimentation, social support, and clear general direction and feedback - the very variables this study explored.

Although challenging, management can influence successful transition by setting a tone and expectations around learning, relationships, communication, and calling people to accountability. It requires administrators to consistently maintain a view of the whole operating system to identify where the flow is open or blockages have formed in the conduits that create the conditions necessary to support fluidity and the work environment quality. An example would be assessing if people are working with each other across organizational boundaries, and if not why. A blockage could be that one area does not know what other areas do and so they don't work together. It could also be that although information is provided from one group to another, it is not in a format that is useful or needed. To be able to identify these areas, administrators have to commit to be ready to hear. They may hear things they do not want to, but the feedback needs to be received with grace. It is the only pro-active way of identifying issues before they become real problems.

Administrators must also trust that employees do have the ability to make informed and viable decisions. There is a certain degree of letting go of the ego, and having faith. If leadership clearly communicates strategic goals, provides the tools and training for staff and faculty against which to measure their choices, then builds accountability for doing so into administrative processes like performance reviews, everyone will be contributing to the same goals in more ways than would be possible if one person is making all of the decisions. The President in this study said that this is a very difficult lesson to learn. He said that when you are in an authority role, the expectation is that you know everything and that you have control of everything.

The problem is that this is not actually possible. What is possible is to build the skill sets that allow employees to see what they need to be considering, have ways of communicating, and ways to get what they need to do their jobs.

Staff and faculty also have their roles and responsibilities. To succeed, this process is reliant on everyone's participation. Just as administration must be committed to hear, this is also the case with staff and faculty. They must be willing to listen to each other, let go of prior assumptions of individuals or groups, and actively work toward solutions. They must also commit to engaging. Engaging encompasses coming to the table, wanting to learn, respectfully communicating, having an intention of inclusivity, and cultivating a positive mindset.

With this process, there is an incredible positive, enthusiastic, and productive energy that can arise. Because people at all levels are focused on figuring out solutions, working together, and are focused, they no longer spend large proportions of energy toward focusing on what cannot be done, what used to be, and how this equates to undervalued they perceive themselves as being. The creative momentum, observable successes, and sense of achievement everyone begins to experience are addictive in a way, and do set a fluid cultural operating state.

It is also important to note that there is also no option for partial implementation or for a short-term implementation trail. For the cultural shift to happen, the whole organizational system must be integrated and integrated over time. After the initial stages have begun, faculty, staff, and administrators will begin testing it to figure out how they themselves need to operate in this new environment. This initially stresses the system,

but this dissipates over time. If the process is not committed to, stakeholders may feel disenfranchised even more than they would have felt otherwise, and inculcate back into the prior status quo. Faith and commitment by stakeholders can be lost and is very difficult to re-establish.

However, in the study, this fluid, high quality work environment state is exactly what all of the participants wanted. In looking at implementation from a cost-benefit perspective, there are short-term costs, but if fully implemented, even when it is difficult, there are not only organizational payoffs, but individual payoffs as well. As long as status quo is made no longer an option, it behooves individuals to participate and commit to the process and the capacity found in each other.

5. 5 Future Research

Although precautions were taken to address as many study limitations as possible, there are still several areas that could be refined and expanded to gain a fuller and more generalizable understanding of fluidity and workplace quality theory as applied in a community college setting. By selecting a larger participant pool, utilizing complete random sampling rather than sampling from a self selected volunteer pool, interviewing participants with a greater variety in time of service, and including an adjunct faculty perspective sampling of the participants could be enhanced. Further exploration could also be conducted longitudinally over multiple points during the year, over multiple years, and in a multi-case format. A longitudinal study would contribute to the ability to map cause and effect, and multiple cases would increase the ability to predict outcomes.

5.6 Study Summary

As explored in this study, the implications of applying organizational fluidity and high quality work environment theory far extend past that of the for profit business realm. Moving beyond purely hypothetical thought, it offers very practical ways of measuring the flexibility of any organizational structure. There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says: “The bamboo that bends is stronger than the oak that resists.” The beauty of this theory is that even though we cannot predict future events that will effect our organizations, through fluidity and work place quality concepts we can create the bamboo like flexibility to meet our missions and thrive in quickly changing environments.

Although this study focused on a vantage point of organizational change and cultural influence from the Presidential level, there is applicability at other levels as well. Faculty, staff, and mid-level administrators could use the same concepts in reviewing their own work, or the work of teams they are involved in. Likewise, the board could also utilize the theory to set expectations for the leadership of the college they govern. Because essential variables are identified, they easily could be worked into assessments of effectiveness and form clear measurable goals.

During the study, the variables and the outcomes resonated incredibly strongly with participants, reviewers, coders, and even people from other fields that knew the researcher. This included people from four year degree granting institutions, from hospitals, museums, a marine biology research funding group, and so on. All very different fields, but the commonality is that they are all organizations made up of people. Organizational fluidity and high quality work environment variables take into

consideration what people need to be motivated, creative, innovative, and to understand the basic direction they are going in. Perhaps through further exploration, studies that explore application in some of these other areas will continue to deepen our understanding of the field and address some of the nuances from each. Insights could easily cycle back to informing application in the for-profit business sector as well. Although there is an assumption that motivators in business center around financial incentives, perhaps this is not always so, and conceptual motivators may hold even more influence.

Arthur Schopenhauer, a late 18th, early 19th century German philosopher, once wrote that “change alone is eternal, perpetual, immortal” (Schopenhauer, 2007). Although we cannot stop change from happening, we can discover new and more effective ways to work effectively and proactively with it. From an organizational standpoint, this is particularly critical, because the handling of new environmental situations has potential to significantly either help or hinder fulfilling missions. Within the business realm, relationships with regard to high quality work environment indicators, stakeholder engagement, and organizational fluidity have elucidated pivotal elements that contribute to institutions’ ability to mitigate changes in the operating environment. This study sought to deepen the understanding of these relationships, all of which form the organizations’ cultural values, performance, social, and objective structures.

By utilizing the Lowe (2007) and Birkinshaw & Gibson (2004) scales along with a semi-structured interview format, an exploratory framework was created that allowed for a holistic view of the state of the fluidity and human resource utilization at the

college. This tool contributes significant benefit in that it shows promise in indicating specific variables that a community college wishing to move toward or maintain a fluid state needs to either improve or maintain. With continued exploration, ultimately the hope with this new understanding is to offer new approaches to community colleges and other types of organizations, to allow them to more fluidly mitigate potentially disrupting events, to recognize environmental opportunity, and most importantly to meet their missions of serving students, communities, and other relevant stakeholders more effectively. This was a beginning step of exploration in the community college realm.

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APPENDIX A

In order to test the fluidity of the six institutions included in the case studies, Likert statements utilized in the 2004 Birkinshaw and Gibson study were utilized. They are as follows:

Please rate the following on a scale of 1-7. 1 being not at all, 4 being neutral, and 7 to a very great extent.

Performance Management Context

Managers in my organization . . .

Set challenging/aggressive goals

Issue creative challenges to their people instead of narrowly defining tasks

Make a point of stretching their people

Use business goals and performance measures to run their businesses

Hold people accountable for their performances

Encourage and reward hard work through incentive compensation

Social Support Context

Managers in my organization . . .

Devote considerable effort to developing subordinates

Push decisions down to the lowest appropriate level

Have access to the information they need to make good decisions

Quickly replicate best practices across organizational boundaries

Treat failure in a good effort as a learning opportunity, not as something to be ashamed of

Are willing and able to take prudent risks

APPENDIX B

To assess workplace quality variables, the following questions were used from Lowe (2001):

- Are your chances for career advancement good?
- Can you choose your own schedule?
- Are your benefits good?
- Does the company/institution have a strong commitment to you?
- Do you feel you have good job security?
- Does your job allow for work and family balance?
- Do you have the freedom to do your job?
- Do you receive the training to do your job effectively?
- Do you receive recognition?
- Do people treat you with respect?
- Is there good communication among co-workers?
- Does your job allow you to develop skills and abilities?
- Is your work interesting?
- Does your job give you a feeling of accomplishment?
- Are people in your workplace helpful and friendly?

During the interview staff and faculty were asked to rank them on the 1 to 7 Likert scale that was employed with the organizational fluidity variables. 1 was not at all, 4 neutral, and 7 to a great extent. The president was asked to rank them separately for staff and faculty.

APPENDIX C

Coding Template**Organizational Fluidity**

Item (Managers . . .)	1 Static State Characteristics	2 Active State Characteristics	3 Fluid State Characteristics
Set challenging and aggressive goals	Subject has little awareness of management's expectations. Work is performed in a relative manner (catch-as-catch can) with emphasis on keeping up with what comes in the door.	Subject is aware of expectations and works in alignment with them. Work culture is aligned with goals, maintains status quo, subjects are not involved with the setting of expectations.	Subject is clear and involved in setting expectations regarding performance, and feels that objectives are pushing past what the unit would have otherwise done.
Issue creative challenges	Few creative challenges are presented by management. Managers expect employees to complete their work in a relatively prescribed fashion.	Periodically employees are encouraged to recommend new ways of performing tasks and approaching work.	Managers regularly and actively engage in activities that encourage employees to design new and innovative/creative ways of doing tasks, solving problems, influencing stakeholder discussions, and arrange the organizational conditions to do so.
"Stretching" subordinates	Employees conduct only the work they are assigned to do. Typically it is performed in a fashion that does not go beyond minimal requirements.	Employees typically conduct their work according to day-to-day requirements. However, due to other operational circumstances the scope and breadth of their work is stretched, because of new environmental demands.	Employees are consistently encouraged to strive for more, rather than less, ambitious performance standards, and management assists guides rather than directs.

Note: Employees are faculty and/or staff members. Managers are anyone with supervisory or programmatic roles above a departmental chair in the institutional hierarchy.

**Organizational Fluidity
(continued)**

Item (Managers . . .)	1 Static State Characteristics	2 Active State Characteristics	3 Fluid State Characteristics
Use business goals & performance measures	Subject has little awareness of business goals and performance measures.	Business goals and performance measures are addressed purely through a reporting or compliance stance.	Managers strive to align activities to goals and measures. They are also regularly part of unit discussions and employee awareness.
Accountability for performance	Employees just do their jobs. They receive little feedback regarding performance, with no repercussion for negative performance or reward for positive performance.	Performance reviews occur, with few recommendations for improvement. Recommendations that are made are not followed up upon to encourage follow through.	There is a transparent system of open, candid, and rapid feedback, including consistent follow up regarding positive or negative performance.
Encourage hard work with incentives	Hard work is rarely incentivized.	Incentives such as time off, financial rewards, course load reduction, are offered; however, not consistently across the organization.	Employees know that if they work hard they will be incentivized with tangible rewards.
Subordinate development	For employees to develop new work competencies & capabilities, they must self-initiate and do so outside of work without support.	Managers suggest areas employees could actively improve their work competency and capability; however employees must discover ways for this to be facilitated without impacting work.	Managers recognize and encourage personal and professional development through regular discussion, adjustment of work schedules, and possibly by providing funding.

Note: Employees are faculty and/or staff members. Managers are anyone with supervisory or programmatic roles above a departmental chair in the institutional hierarchy.

Organizational Fluidity
(continued)

Item (Managers . . .)	1 Static State Characteristics	2 Active State Characteristics	3 Fluid State Characteristics
Decisions made at lowest appropriate level	Decisions are made by managers without employee input	Employees are involved in some decisions that specifically affecting their work.	Employees are involved in decisions that affect them. The organization is lateral in nature with an emphasis on team collaboration.
Replication of best practices from within the organization	Each unit acts independently of other units in the institution. Workers understand their areas, but are unaware of what is happening across campus.	Communication between managers happens, but is not consistent across the institution. Some units are working primarily autonomously and some are collaborative.	Regular communication and cross-training happens between units across campus. Management is highly integrative, collaborative, and focused on the mission of the organization.
Failure treated as a learning opportunity	Non-accomplishment of work objectives by employees are treated as failures with no evaluation of potential causes of the failure or ways to improve.	Employee failure is viewed as somewhat acceptable and a part of doing business; however, little evaluation for improving mis-actions and misjudgment is conducted. Learning from the experience is not pursued.	Failure is viewed as a learning opportunity. Experimentation is encouraged, and results examined to determine what can be gleaned from the experience to improve overall performance.
Management's ability to take risk	Management does not engage in implementing ideas or procedures for fear of repercussion.	Management engages in selected experimentation as long as it is in line with the mission, vision, and goals of the organization. However, this activity is not consistent across units.	Managers are regularly involved in informed experimentation as part of expected organizational culture. This behavior is not only nurtured, but is an organizational norm.

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High Quality Work Environments

(Individually oriented concepts)

Item	1 Static State Characteristics	2 Active State Characteristics	3 Fluid State Characteristics
Opportunity for career advancement	Little opportunity for career advancement exists	Some opportunities for advancement exist, and employees throughout the institution are aware of them.	Strong opportunities for career advancement exist. Employees are mentored to support their professional development, clear and definite pathways are elucidated, and positions exist.
Ability to select working schedules	Employee schedules are largely determined by management, and deviation from these schedules is frowned upon.	Some opportunity to select one's own schedule exists. Flex schedules, delayed start times, and/or 1/2 hour lunches are allowed with managerial permission.	Employees have a high degree of schedule flexibility. There may be some time constraints, but for the most part individuals are able to work when and the how long they need to work to get the job done. Working remotely may be an option.
Strong organizational commitment to employees	Employees perceive little commitment to them by the organization.	Employees feel that organizational leaders care about them in the day-to-day. However, when the difficult decisions are made, employee wellbeing is low on the list of consideration.	Employees feel that no matter what, organizational leadership has their best interests at heart. Uncomfortable decisions may be made, but the welfare of employees is a primary consideration.

Note: Employees are faculty and/or staff members. Managers are anyone with supervisory or programmatic roles above a departmental chair in the institutional hierarchy.

High Quality Work Environments

(continued)

Item	1 Static State Characteristics	2 Active State Characteristics	3 Fluid State Characteristics
Job security	Employees do not know from one day to the next if they will have a job.	Employees feel that for the most part their job is safe and that their skills are valued. However, due to environmental strains (budget, politics) there is a possibility that they may be unemployed.	Employees feel that they are very safe in their job. They have valued skills, work ethics, and are vital to the institutional workings. They know that they have a stable employment situation that they can count on.
Job allows for work/life balance	Job demands severely limit the employee's ability to meet obligations external to their workplace. These personal demands may be family related, but may also be activities that provide intrinsic value for the individual.	Employees are able to balance work demands with external obligations to the extent that they may address family issues, attend external events, and personal interest activities as long as their schedule is fairly predictable and for the most part occurs outside of their 40 hour per week work schedule.	Employees have the leeway to actively participate both in their workplace and in their homes. Schedules can be flexed to accommodate this, and there are no penalties for doing so. Activities could be community service, family related, or personal interest related.
Freedom to do ones job	Managers provide procedures for even minute tasks. Variance from procedure is actively discouraged.	Managers provide procedures to their employees. However on a day-to-day basis, employees are self directed in conducting this work. Managers are also open to suggestions for improvement, but do not solicit them.	Managers do not provide procedures, but do provide end goals. Employees are then free to ascertain what is needed to complete tasks, and how to go about them.

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High Quality Work Environments
(continued)

Item	1 Static State Characteristics	2 Active State Characteristics	3 Fluid State Characteristics
Provide needed training	Little training is available for employees to develop the skills they need to effectively do their jobs.	Training is available for employees to develop necessary skills. Furthermore, managers recognize areas staff could further develop skills and present opportunities to them.	Training is readily available to employees. Managers recognize areas staff could further develop, present opportunities, and facilitate their participation in these activities with flexible schedules, possible financial assistance, and social support.
Provide recognition	Employees work is rarely recognized. They do their job, and must cultivate their own personal satisfaction.	Employees often receive praise from others in recognition of a job well done. Recognition is localized to the areas they work in or with.	Employees often receive recognition from within their units and from others across the institution. Institutional recognition such as formal awards are seen as valuable rather than meaningless exercises.
Culture of respect	Employees feel that their skills, talents, and work are not valued.	Employees feel that they are treated with positive high regard in some areas, but this regard is not uniform across the institution.	Employees feel that they are treated with positive high regard. In addition to feeling treated well, they know that they are likewise expected to do the same with others in the work place.

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High Quality Work Environments (continued)

Item	1 Static State Characteristics	2 Active State Characteristics	3 Fluid State Characteristics
Facilitate good communication among co-workers	Employees rarely communicate with each other. Information and practices are localized.	Employees communicate well within their unit, and sporadically with others across the institution.	Employees regularly communicate across the institution. They are aware of operations in other areas and readily receive and provide vital information across institutional boundaries.
Encourage skill & ability development	Employees have little opportunity to invest in development of skills and abilities necessary to effectively perform their job duties.	Employees are able to develop skills and abilities that would increase their capacity to work with evolving job responsibilities and remain current on related current trends.	Employees are able to develop skills and abilities to deepen their professional capacity. They are aware of available opportunities, schedules are accommodated, and financial resources may be provided. Personal growth is encouraged.
Interesting work	Employees find their work monotonous and dull.	Employees have repetitive tasks, but there is just enough of what they find intriguing to find it fulfilling and worthwhile.	Employees are exhilarated by the challenges their work offers.

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High Quality Work Environments (continued)

Item	1 Static State Characteristics	2 Active State Characteristics	3 Fluid State Characteristics
Sense of accomplishment	Employees feel that their work produces little value.	Employees perceive their work as providing value. This perception is not readily apparent to them, but they construct it through connecting experiences and assigning value to them.	Employees feel that their work is making a difference and find great satisfaction in this. Culturally they collectively internalize deep personal meaning through this positive accomplishment.
Helpful & friendly workplace	Individuals feel that the environment is hostile. Employees do not work together and may indeed avoid interaction.	Employees are cordial with each other, but do not actively engage in collaboration or relationships with each other.	Employees frequently collaborate and foster a sense of camaraderie amongst them. Environments are welcoming, and people feel good about being there.

Note: Employees are faculty and/or staff members. Managers are anyone with supervisory or programmatic roles above a departmental chair in the institutional hierarchy.

